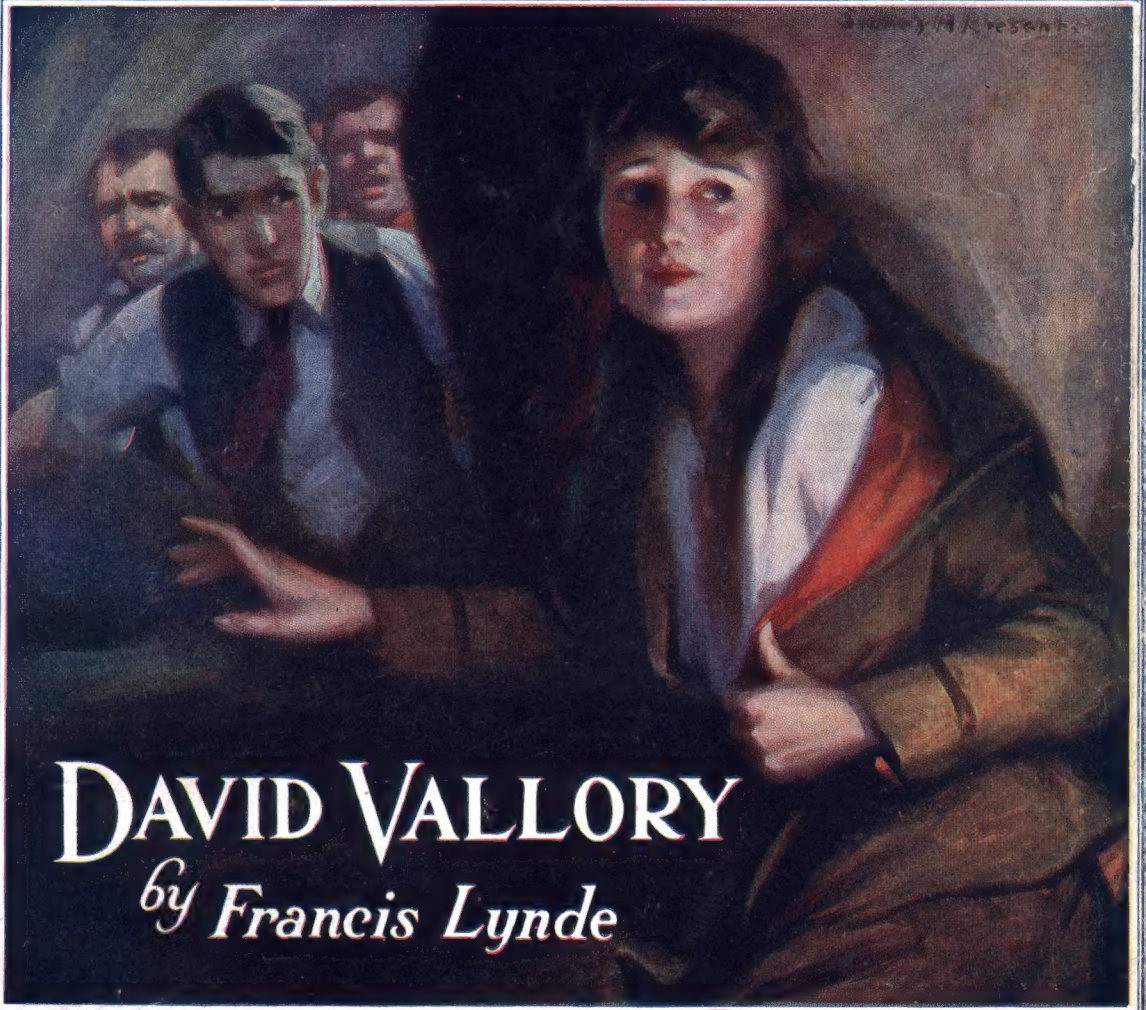


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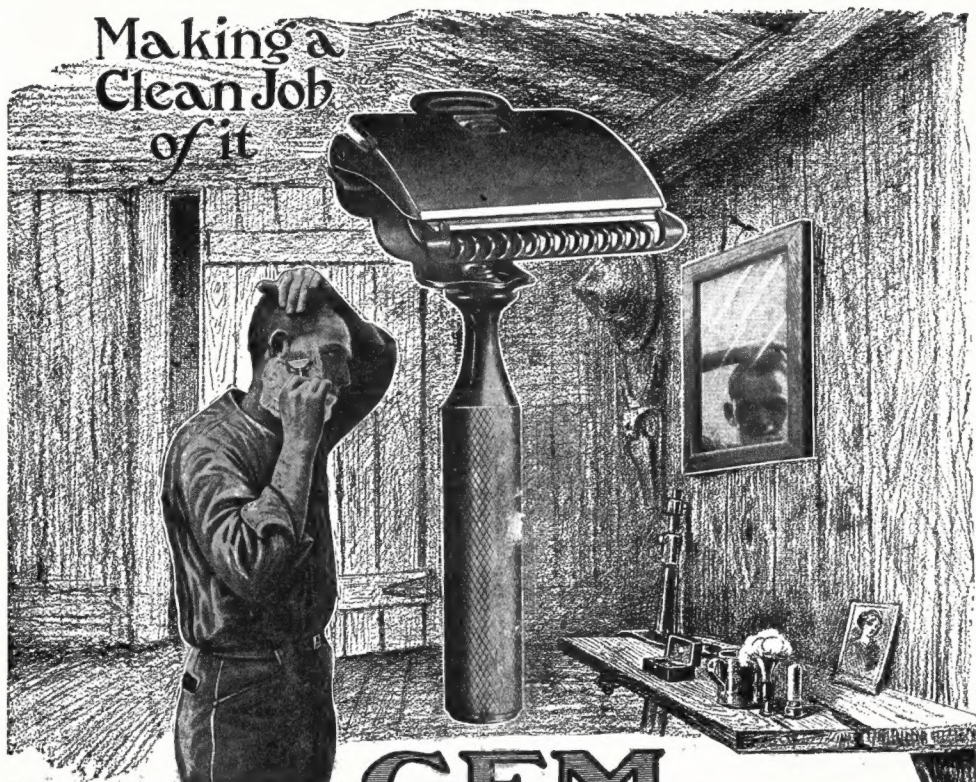
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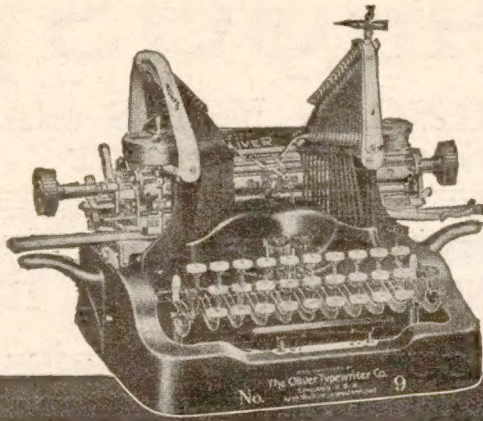
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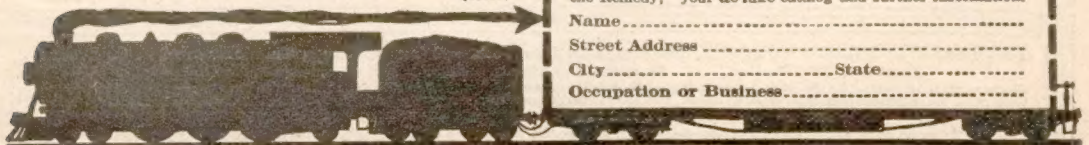
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ARGOSY

AND RAILROAD MAN'S MAGAZINE

Vol. CV

ISSUED WEEKLY

NUMBER 4

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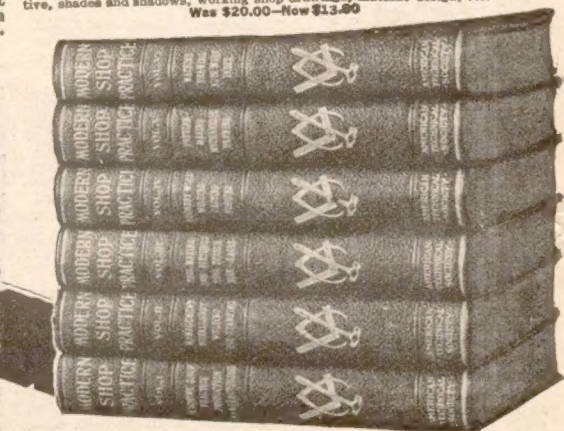
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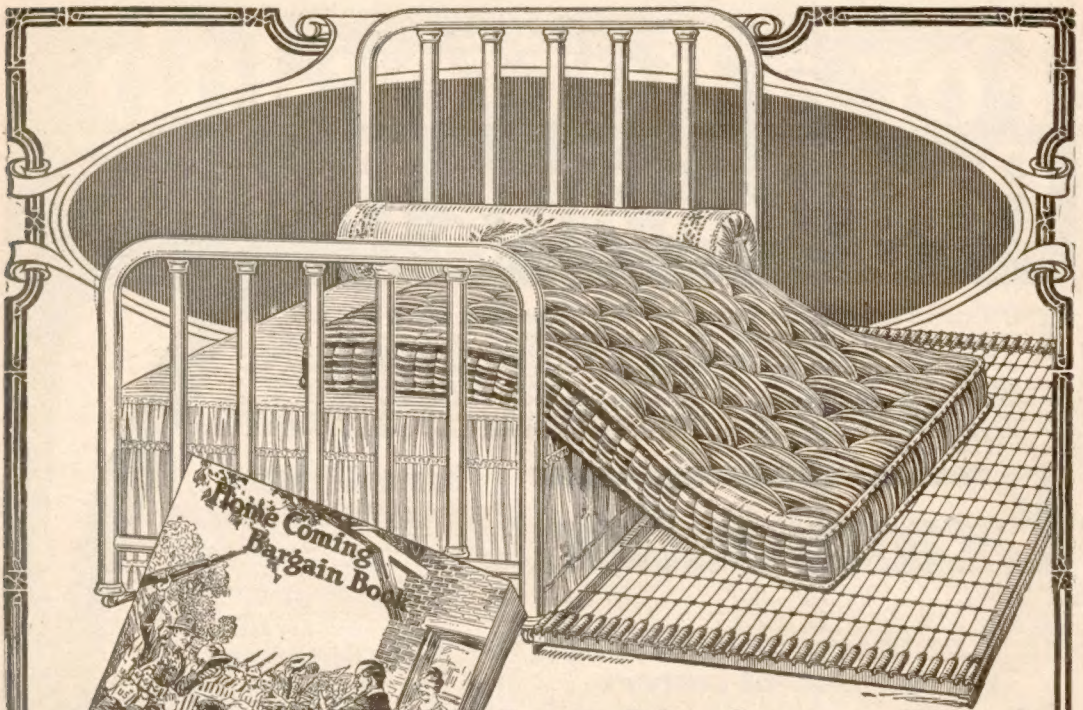
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David Vallory

by Francis Lynde

CHAPTER I.

CHAOTIC.

VALLORY'S train, to make which he had so suddenly dropped pencil and mapping-pen in the office of the government harbor-deepening project on the Florida coast, was an hour late arriving at Middleboro; and in this, his first homecoming from the distant government assignment, the aspect of things once so familiar was jarred a trifle out of focus. It was not that the June fields were less green, or the factory suburb through which the train was slowing more dusty and unsightly. But there was a change, and it was vaguely depressive.

"Your home town?" inquired the man in the opposite seat of the Pullman as his section-sharer began to gather his luggage.

Vallory nodded. "Yes; I was born here in Middleboro."

The man who had occupied the upper berth took in the country-town tritenesses as the open car windows passed them in review.

"A man may be born anywhere," he remarked. "But it's a safe bet that you'll not die here—unless you should chance to be killed in an accident!"

Vallory, sober-faced and preoccupied, looked up from the traveling-bag strapping.

"Why do you say that?" he asked.

The older man smiled with a rather grim widening of the lips half-hidden by the cropped mustache and beard.

"You are young, and youth is always impatient of the narrow horizons. Let me make another guess. You have been away for some time, and this is your first return. You are finding it a bit disappointing. Am I right?"

"Not exactly disappointing," Vallory denied.

"Well, different, then. You may not realize it yet, but you have outgrown the home town. I know, because, years ago, I had the same experience myself. Do your people live here?"

The train had been stopped in the yard by a dropped semaphore arm, and for the moment Vallory was at the mercy of his chance traveling companion. Yet he told himself that there was no good reason why he should be churlish.

"Yes; my father and sister live here. And I have lived here all my life save for the four years in college and the past two years in Florida."

"College—to be sure," agreed the inquisitor half-absently. "What course, if I may ask?"

"Engineering."

At this the bearded one exhibited a tiny fob-charm made in the shape of a trestle-bent, and extended a square-fingered hand.

"Shake!" he said, with something more than middle-Western informality. "I happen to be one of the same. Now I'm quite sure you won't die here in—Middletown—is that the name?—always barring the untoward accident, of course."

"Middleboro," Vallory corrected. Then to the repetition of the prophecy: "You are probably right. I found that I had to go away from home to get my first job. I have been on government work in Florida—rivers and harbors—for the past two years."

"Government work? A deep grave and a safe one. Would you mind telling me why you chose to bury yourself in it?"

Vallory's smile was still good-natured.

"Not in the least. I did what most college men do: took the first reasonably decent thing that offered. It wasn't exactly what I wished, but my own particular line was a bit dull two years ago. I majored in railroad building."

"Railroad building, eh? That's my trade, too," said the other. Then, with an overlooking glance that was too frankly appraisive to be mistaken for anything else: "You'll go far, my friend—if you're not too good."

Vallory's smile broadened into a short laugh. "Just what do you mean by that?"

"Precisely what I say; no more and no less. You can take it from a total stranger, can't you? You have a good jaw, and I shouldn't care to get in your way, if you had any reason to wish to beat me up! But, if you'll permit me, your eyes tell another story."

Vallory had a telegram in his pocket, the brief summons which, two days earlier, had caused him to drop pen and pencil in the Florida office shack and hasten to catch the first north-bound train. There was nothing in the wording of the message to breed alarm; but the mere fact that his father had telegraphed him to come home had awakened disturbing qualms of anxiety.

Wondering if he were still callow enough to advertise the inward disquietude so plainly that a stranger might read the signs of it, he gave the required liberty.

"Well, go on!" he said. "What do my eyes tell you?"

"This: that in spite of your twenty-six, seven or eight years, whatever they may be, you are still a whole-souled boy, in the sense that you take things at their apparent face-value! You believe good of a man until the evil is proved, and even then you change reluctantly. You hold your word as binding as your oath."

"In short, you are still sufficiently unspoiled to believe that the world is much better than the muck-rakers would make it out to be. Isn't this all true?"

"I should be sorry if I had to contradict you," Vallory replied soberly. "And, even so, you are only accusing me of the common, civilized conventions. The world has been very decent to me, thus far. Doesn't it occur to you that a man usually finds what he looks for in life—that, as a general proposition, he gets just about what he is willing to give?"

The bearded man shook his head, as one too well seasoned to argue with unvictimized youth.

"Four years in college and two in a government service, which taught you absolutely nothing about life as it is lived in a world of sharply competitive business!" he scoffed gently. "Ah, well; we'll let it go with a word of advice—the advice of a man whose name you don't know, and

whom you will most likely never meet again:

"When you come to take the plunge—the real plunge into the sure-enough puddle of life as it is lived by most of us—don't tie up too hard with any man, or set of men, or yet to those old-fashioned principles which you have been taught to regard as law and gospel. If you do, you won't succeed—in the only sense in which the world measures success."

The train was moving on again now, and Vallory was not sorry. Being healthily suspicious of cynicism in any of its forms, he was glad that his bearded section-mate had not chosen to begin on him at the dining-car breakfast where they had first met. None the less, at the station-stop he shook hands with the volunteer prophet of evil.

"Good-by!" he said. "I'd like to hear your estimate of the next man with whom you happen to share a Pullman section. But part of your prediction will doubtless come true. I have definitely broken away from the government job, and I shall probably not stay very long in Middleboro."

As he left the train he glanced at his watch. It was past nine—therefore his father would be at the bank. With only his hand-bag for encumbrance, he crossed the platform and walked rapidly up the main street, with the well-remembered home-town surroundings still making their curiously depressive appeal.

The Middleboro Security Bank, housed in a modest two-storied brick, three squares up from the railroad station, seemed, as he approached it, to be a center of subdued excitement. Early as the hour was a number of farmers' teams were halted at the curb, and little knots and groups of the townspeople obstructed the sidewalk.

Vallory nodded good morning to one and another of the folk he had known from his boyhood, and was immediately conscious of a sort of hushed constraint on the part of those who returned his greetings.

In the bank an orderly throng was pressing its way in sober silence to the paying-teller's window. There were no signs of panic, and any excitement that might underlie the unusual rush of business seemed to be carefully suppressed.

But Vallory saw that old Abner Winkle and the clerk he had called into the cage to help him wore anxious faces; and Winkle's hands, the hands of a man who had grown gray in the service of the country-town bank, were trembling a little as he carefully counted out the money to the waiting check-holders.

David Vallory made his way to the rear of the narrow lobby, to a door with a ground-glass panel bearing the word "President" in black lettering. He entered without knocking, and was careful to snap the catch of the lock behind him.

A tall, thinly bearded man, prematurely white-haired, with a face that was almost effeminate in its skin-texture and the fineness of its lines, and with the near-sighted eyes and rounded shoulder-stoop of a student and a book-lover, stood up to greet him.

"David, boy!" he exclaimed. "I'm glad you are here. I waited as long as I dared. I knew it would be a shock to you when it came, and I didn't want to unsteady your hand and brain with the bad news. But at the close of banking hours, two days ago, I saw that I couldn't put it off much longer."

David Vallory drew a chair to the desk end and felt mechanically for his pipe and tobacco.

"Let's have it, dad," he said. "I'm here to take hold with you, and there are two of us now. What's gone wrong?"

"The thing that went wrong dates back to a time before you were born, David—to the time when I allowed your grandfather and some others to persuade me that I ought to make a business man of myself. It was a sorry mistake. I haven't been a good banker."

The younger man shook his head in filial deprecation. "You have been a good father to Lucille and me, and that counts for much more than being a successful money-grabber. But what is the present trouble? Are you having a run on the bank?"

"It is scarcely a run, as yet, though there have been a good many withdrawals, and there will doubtless be more. If it should come to a run—"

"Let me have it all," the listener en-

couraged when the pause grew long. "Do you mean that the bank isn't solvent?"

"It is not," was the low-toned answer, given without qualification. "I have made a number of bad loans. So long as I had to deal only with neighbors and friends, men whom I have known and trusted all my life, there was not so much risk. But when the town began to grow and the factories came in, I was out of my element. Then Mugridge started the Middleboro National. He took his pick of the new customers and let us have the fag-ends. The Stove Works went into bankruptcy a week ago, and that was the last straw for us."

"You were carrying Carnaby, of the Stove Works?" asked the son.

"Yes; for much more than his capitalization, or our resources, would warrant. He has been very plausible, and I have believed in him, as I have in others. The story leaked out, as such stories always do. There has been no panic; but we are having a steady stream of withdrawals and account-closings, and the end is practically in sight."

David Vallory was silent for a time, leaning forward with an elbow on the desk-slide and his chin resting in his palm. Middleboro folk said that he favored his mother's people, and the square-set jaw and firm-lipped mouth bore out the assertion.

But the gray eyes had reflective depths in them, and they were the Vallory eyes. A stronger man than his father, one would have said—though perhaps only as athletic youth is stronger than age. A close observer, like the crop-bearded stranger of the Pullman car, might have added that the strength was idealistic rather than practical—the strength of endurance rather than of aggressiveness.

"Just how bad is it—in actual figures?" he asked at the end of the thoughtful pause.

Adam Vallory closed his eyes as one wearied and stunned in the clamor of battle.

"We can go on paying to-day, and perhaps to-morrow. Beyond that there is failure for the bank, and—and beyond the failure, David, there is a prison for me."

The younger man straightened up quickly.

"Good Heavens! You don't mean that!" he exclaimed in a shocked voice.

"Yes. I have been weak—criminally weak, others will say. All along I have been clinging desperately to the hope that we could pull through; that the bad paper we hold would somehow miraculously turn into good paper. A better business man would have faced the worst weeks ago. I didn't. We have gone on receiving deposits when I knew that we were to all intents and purposes insolvent. That is a penitentiary offense."

David Vallory sprang to his feet and began to pace up and down the length of the small room, three strides and a turn. It was his first rude collision with the world of business, and for the moment he could only battle fiercely for standing-room in it. He had known, in a vague way, that his book-loving father was no money-getter, in any modern sense of the word, but there had always been enough and something to spare for him and for the blind sister, whose birth had cost the mother's life. With the healthy ambition of the average college man, he had been looking forward to the time when he should go to work for himself in his chosen field. But now the world of sober anticipation had gone suddenly and hopelessly awry.

"We mustn't think of giving up, dad!" he broke out, after he had tramped his way through to some measure of decision. "We must turn everything we have into money and save the bank and your good name. Can't you find some one who will carry you until we can make the turn?"

Adam Vallory shook his head.

"I have anticipated you there, son. Six months ago I began borrowing on my private resources. There is nothing left—not even the homestead. I suppose I should have told you; but that was another weakness, David. I wished you to have a chance to finish your college course and get your start without the distractions, and that much, at least, has been accomplished."

Once more the younger man tried to stem the torrent of the incredible reversals, and was partly successful.

"We can still hope that it isn't as bad as you think it is, dad," he said optimis-

tically. "In a few minutes I'm going to pull off my coat and have a look at things from the inside. We'll not go down without a fight. Apart from this prison scare—and it is only a scare, you know—no Middleboro jury would ever believe for a moment that you meant to do a criminal act—apart from that, there are two mighty good reasons why we mustn't go to the dogs entirely!"

"Lucille?" queried the father.

"Yes; she is one of the reasons. Life is always going to be hard enough for the little sister without adding poverty and a sorrow that she can neither help nor hinder."

"True; and the other reason?"

David Vallory had sat down again, and a boyish flush came to darken the healthy brown which was the gift of a more or less athletic youth.

"I didn't intend to tell you—not just yet," he demurred; "at least, not until I had got my billet and could prove that you haven't been throwing your money away on me. I—I've found the girl, dad."

The older man leaned back in his chair, and again the tired eyes were closed.

"That is natural, and was to be expected," he acquiesced. "You have been very moderate, David. You are twenty-eight and your own man. Many another young fellow would have found not one girl but a round dozen before reaching your age."

David Vallory's laugh matched the absurdity of the "round dozen."

"I'm not built that way, I guess," he returned. "There is only one girl; and though I hadn't realized it until lately, I think I discovered her to be that one while I was still wearing knickerbockers."

"Tell me as much as you care to," said the father.

"There isn't so very much to tell. I've—well, I've just found her; that's all. I met her last winter at Palm Beach. She was down there with a bunch of New York people who go every year. Raglan, my chief on the government job, knew her and some of her New York friends. He began to introduce me, but she laughed and said: 'Mr. Vallory and I were rocked in the same

cradle—in old Middleboro,' and that settled it."

The tired man in the pivot-chair roused himself at the mention of the home-town name.

"Middleboro? She belongs here, then?"

"Not now. She is a citizen of a much larger world."

"Do I know her or her people? But, of course, I must."

"You do. You have held her on your knee and told her fairy stories many a time, while I stood by and listened. Doesn't that place her for you?"

Adam Vallory shook his head with a smile that was reminiscent of pleasanter things than the navigating of stormy seas in a sinking business craft.

"I have held many little girls on my knee, to tell them fairy tales, David. That is another reason why I should never have been a banker; I love children—and fairy tales—far too well."

"You would never guess," said David with all the fatuousness of a beginning lover. "Yet you and her father were schoolboys together."

Adam Vallory sat up with a start. "Not Eben Grillage?"

"Yes—she is Mr. Grillage's daughter—the brown-eyed little Vinnie we used to know—though they all call her 'Miss Virginia' now."

Again the upcast of reminiscence came to make Adam Vallory forget for the moment the rotten business craft that was sinking beneath him.

"Eben Grillage," he mused. "He was, and is, everything that I am not. He was a born leader, even as a boy. Success, or what the world calls success, has been his for the taking. You have seen him, David? Is he growing old, as I am?"

"You are old only in hard work—work that doesn't appeal to you," the son said loyally. Then: "I have met Mr. Grillage only once, and—and I guess he didn't have much time for an apprentice engineer who was just then trying his prettiest to get a chance to talk over old times with his daughter. I remember he asked about you."

"That was in Florida?"

"Yes. I chased over to Palm Beach as often as I could during the short season, but it didn't do me much good. There were too many other fellows in ahead of me. It was on one of the trips that I met Mr. Grillage. He had run down from some place in Georgia, where his company is building a dam, to spend the week-end with his daughter. The most he said to me was in the nature of a 'josh' for burying myself on a government job."

Adam Vallory nodded. "You don't remember Vinnie's mother, of course; she died while you were still only a little lad. She was what we, in my younger days, used to call a belle—a most attractive woman, and as true and good as she was beautiful. Eben Grillage had none of the qualities that such women are supposed to care for—save one; he was big enough and strong enough to reach out and take what he wanted. He idolized her; and the love which was hers, while she lived, has been carried along to his daughter."

"Any one can see that," said the younger man, laughing. "Virginia is the apple of his eye. Have you kept in touch with him?"

"Only at long intervals."

"They say he is rich and rapidly growing richer. He has made the Grillage Engineering Company; built it from the ground up; and there isn't any job too big for him to undertake and carry through. If he wasn't Virginia's father, I'd strike him for a job—after we get things straightened out here for you."

"He would do well by you, for old times' sake, I don't doubt. To me, Eben Grillage has never been the hard man that others seem to find him; he is still the loyal friend of the boyhood days. Different as we were, or perhaps because of that difference, we were like brothers. Why should the fact that he is Vinnie's father make you hold back?"

"I don't know that I can explain it, even to you, dad. But, somehow, I should feel handicapped. Virginia has a mighty, keen, sharp-edged little mind of her own. I have a notion that she wouldn't think much of a fellow that her father was nursing along by hand."

"Perhaps you are right. But tell me more about Vinnie."

"I wish there were more to tell. I have met her a few times, and she has been mighty sweet to me—for the sake of the kiddie days here in Middleboro, as she occasionally takes care to remind me. I'm not in her set, you know; not even in the outer edges of it; and, as I have said, she has a string of fellows as long as your arm. It's only a pipe-dream for me, as yet, and I must forget it until after we have staved off this trouble of yours. Will you be good enough to turn me loose among the money-papers and securities? I'd like to make a few figures."

With this for a beginning, David Vallory's first day of his home-coming resolved itself into a grind of hard work. Through what was left of the forenoon, and straight on until three o'clock—welcome-hour when the bank doors were shut upon the public, and the tired old paying-teller and his assistant had an opportunity to balance their cash—the young man toiled on steadily, sometimes with his father at his elbow, but oftener alone.

What he discovered sobered him at first, and later evoked symptoms of panic. The Middleboro Security, a one-man bank, in all that the term implies, was—unless some of the bad paper could be redeemed—plainly insolvent; and what was worse, the insolvency was of long standing. The failure of the Carnaby Stove Works had been merely the firing-spark for the explosion. Without immediate help—help that must run into the tens of thousands—the bank must close its doors.

Though the June afternoon was not overwarm, David Vallory found himself sweating profusely when the final column of figures had been added. In the quiet of the bank, where Winkle and the three clerks were still figuring silently for their balances after the strenuous day, a menacing shadow fell. It was not only ruin; it was ruin with disgrace.

David Vallory was far from holding his father responsible in any moral way, though it was apparent that the present state of affairs had been long threatened. That it had not climaxed sooner was due chiefly to

the fact that for many years the country-town bank had done business only with honest customers.

The son was not blind to his father's one amiable weakness. It was known far and wide that Adam Vallory could never say "No" to a borrower; also, that he judged all men by his own standards.

David Vallory got up from the table desk at which he had been working and slowly struggled into his coat. He did not—could not—minimize the impending consequences. The bank examiner would come, and at his coming there would come, also, the publicity which would mean exposure and a criminal prosecution.

Those who knew Adam Vallory would refuse to believe that he had consciously committed a crime; but to the wider world he would figure merely as another addition to the ranks of those who gamble with other people's money—a banker who had taken the desperate chance of receiving deposits when there was no reasonable hope of repaying the depositors.

The old-fashioned clock on the wall was striking four as David Vallory gathered up the slips of paper which he had been covering with figures and passed out to the small room at the rear of the working space. The gray-faced man bending dejectedly over his desk and waiting had no illusions. "Well, son?" he said as David came in.

The young man dropped heavily into a chair and sat for some moments staring at the slips of figure-covered paper.

"You didn't make it any worse than it really is—when you told me about it this morning," he announced soberly. "Winkle gave me his figures just now; the withdrawals for to-day. If they come after us to-morrow as they have to-day, we sha'n't be able to last until three o'clock. I've gone over everything with a fine-tooth comb; we need something like a hundred thousand dollars more than we have in sight."

Adam Vallory's gaze was fixed upon the dust-covered steamship lithograph hanging above his desk, but he saw the picture only with the outward eye.

"A hundred thousand," he repeated slowly. "David, it might as well be a million. There is no use. I shall telegraph

for the bank examiner to-night, and we won't open the doors in the morning."

CHAPTER II.

EBEN GRILLAGE.

AT his father's definite acknowledgment of defeat, David Vallory rose and thrust the penciled slips into his pocket.

"I can't advise; I'm too young and too raw," he admitted. "But everything in me rises up to yell for an endurance fight. Some of the bad paper can be made good if we employ an up-to-date attorney and put the pressure on. In the savings department we can gain time by insisting upon the sixty days' notice of withdrawal that the law permits. It is tough to have to go down without firing a gun, dad!"

"I know," was the discouraged reply. "But the fight has all been taken out of me, David. You mustn't think that I have sat here in my chair and let things take their course without making a struggle. I haven't. I have tried to borrow, and have practically gone on my knees to Mugridge. He was as cold as a fish; told me that I ought to push my collections."

"Have you consulted an attorney?"

"Not specifically. Young Oswald knows, and he has advised me—as a friend. He would make a legal fight for us if I would permit him to."

"Bert Oswald is going to make himself the rarest combination on earth: a man who will be stubbornly honest and upright in spite of his profession," said the son, who magnified his own profession to the detriment of some others. "Why don't you employ him?"

It was Adam Vallory's turn to show embarrassment.

"Bert has been coming to the house rather oftener than his boyhood friendship with you would seem to warrant," he returned, half hesitantly. "This morning you gave me your reason for not wishing to take service under Eben Grillage. Can't you imagine that I may have a somewhat similar reason for not wishing to involve Oswald in this despicable business of ours?"

David Vallory looked up with a brow-lifting of surprise. "Lucille?" he queried.

The father nodded, adding: "It can come to nothing, of course. Lucille herself would be the first to insist that one with her affliction has no right to become a wife and mother. But it has been a great comfort to her to have Oswald dropping in at odd moments. He understands her thoroughly, shares her love for music, and all that. He has even taught her to play chess. For Lucille's sake, we mustn't drag him into this mess of ours."

This reluctantly given explanation opened a new field of dismay for David Vallory. As it seemed, there was a separate and distinct disaster reaching out for each member of the family of three. His love for his blind sister was deep and tender, and at the moment his own involvement shrank to inconsequence, as it was constrained to when he realized how heavily the blow would fall upon one who had been sheltered and protected in every way, as his sister had been.

"You have fully made up your mind to wire for the examiner to-night?" he asked, after another interval of vain strivings for a helpful suggestion.

Adam Vallory looked away toward the window and the vacant country-town street beyond it.

"We may as well take the plunge. The day of reckoning has come, and a few hours, one way or the other, can make no possible difference. I shall have to face the music in the end; we shall all three have to face it. If there were the slenderest possibility of escape—"

The interruption, voices in the adjoining banking-room, gruff tones raised emphatically, and Winkle's voice parroting placative explanations had been growing upon the silence of the rear office, and it culminated now in the abrupt opening of the door of privacy.

The intruder, whom Winkle had apparently been attempting to bar out, was a big man with a clean-shaven face in which each feature seemed to have been massively exaggerated to make it harmonize with the gigantic figure; a great Roman beak of a nose; a hard-bitted mouth buttressed

by a jaw over which the heavy cheeks hung like the dewlaps of a bulldog; strong teeth clamping a black cigar; shrewd eyes that glared from beneath penthouse brows—a man who, in the stone age, would have acquired the most commodious of the caves and swung the heaviest of the clubs.

"Adam—you old snipe!" was the giant's explosive greeting, and his hand-grip fairly lifted the slighter man out of his chair. "Nice kind of a welcome your watchdog cashier out there was trying to give me: said you were busy and couldn't be interrupted. How are you, David, boy?"

And now it came David's turn to wince under the hand grasp; at least, until he could summon his athletic training and do a little bone-crushing on his own account.

Adam Vallory, sunk in the depths of despair but a moment before, made a generous effort to rise to the hospitable requirements.

"You took us completely unawares, Eben. I didn't dream you were anywhere within a day's journey of Middleboro. It is a pleasure to see your face again; you don't give me the chance any too often. Sit down, if you can find a chair big enough to hold you, and tell us what good wind has blown you back to the old hometown."

The big man seated himself, and the chair, though it was a stout one, whined its protest.

"Business, Adam; always business. We have an order in with your two-by-four equipment factory here for a lot of 'scrapes' and dump-cars, and at the last minute Judson wired that he couldn't deliver on time. I came down here to read the riot act to him. He'll ship now. I've just been out to see him." Then to David: "Young man, how soon can I get a train back to Chicago?"

David Vallory looked up the required information. The next through train would leave at nine o'clock. The visitor glanced at his watch.

"That gives us about four hours, Adam, and we ought to be able to pull up a good lot of the arrears in that time. Shut up your desk and call it a day. We'll go over to the hotel and be boys together for a

little while. David will stay here and wind up the odds and ends of the day's business for you."

Adam Vallory was opening his mouth to protest hospitably against the hotel, but his son broke in ahead of him.

"I'm mighty glad you can have a little time with dad, Mr. Grillage," he interposed quickly. "We were speaking of you this morning, and I was telling dad that I had met you for a few minutes one day last winter. Take him away with you, and I'll stay and close the bank."

"Good boy!" was the gruff rejoinder. "By and by, when you get around to it, you may make a sleeper reservation for me on that nine-o'clock train. Wire for it, and bring the answer over to the hotel. No, Adam"—to the host who was trying to make himself a host instead of a guest—"you're not going to take me home with you this time. I want you all to myself. We'll go to the hotel and make old Vignaux give us one of his Frenchy dinners in a private room. Get your hat and come along."

Left to himself, David Vallory checked over the day's transactions with Winkle, telegraphed for the big man's berth in the Chicago sleeper, and then walked out to the tree-shaded suburb on the hill to eat dinner with his sister.

To his great satisfaction, he found young Oswald at the house, and the presence of the visitor, who was easily persuaded to make a third at the family dinner-table, pushed the disaster explanations a little farther into the future.

Though David forced himself to talk at the table-for-three, his cheerful attempt to keep the conversation in some safe middle-of-the-road did not blind him to the sentimental situation developing under his eyes.

His sister, whose delicate, rose-leaf beauty was a direct inheritance from her father, was more animated than usual, and it was doubly hard to realize that the softly lighted eyes, lifted shyly now and then in Oswald's direction, were sightless. And as for the clean-cut, eager-faced young attorney, there was small attempt at concealment on his part.

David Vallory left the house after dinner

with a heavy heart. He had known Oswald all his life, and liked him. He was well assured that the young lawyer would stand by and be the loyal friend of the family in the storm that was preparing to burst. But the outcome of it all would be a swift conflagration in the sentimental field and a heart-breaking awakening for the blind sister, who was obviously in love with Oswald without realizing it.

On the half-mile walk to the hotel, David Vallory told himself in many and most emphatic repetitions that something must be done to avert the triple-headed calamity; though what it should be was entirely beyond him.

It was past eight o'clock when he reached Vignaux's and found a quiet corner in the small lobby where he could smoke and wait for the two who were bringing up the boyhood arrears. When the waiting ended, it was only the burly guest-host who appeared, coming down the stairs from the private dining-room suite alone.

Catching sight of David, he crossed the lobby, cast his big body heavily into a chair, and lighted a cigar, the end of which was already chewed into shapelessness.

"You have sent dad home?" inquired the son, after he had delivered the telegram assuring the big man of the reserved space in the sleeping-car.

"No!" disgustedly. "Some crazy farmer broke in on us a few minutes ago and insisted on taking your father over to the bank. Said he had an option on a piece of land, and was obliged to get his money to-night to make good on it."

David Vallory winced. He knew perfectly well that the excuse given had been only an excuse; that the intruding farmer was merely one of the badly frightened depositors who was afraid to wait for another day. He was wondering how much or how little his father had told Grillage of the threatened disaster when the big man went on.

"There is something the matter with your father, David. All evening he's been acting like a man with a clot on his brain. Hasn't been sick, has he?"

"No; he hasn't been sick."

"Humph! Then it's business. How much do you know about his banking affairs?"

"All there is to know, I guess," said David, looking down.

The head of the Grillage Engineering Company twisted himself in his chair and bored into the young man at his side with the masterful eyes.

"Up against it, is he?" he growled. "It was bound to come, sooner or later. Anywhere else but in Middleboro he would have gone ashore years ago; I've always told him that. Shake it loose, young man, and give me the facts."

David Vallory hesitated. If his father had not seen fit to confide in the friend of his youth, it was not for the son to betray him.

"I don't know as I ought to do that, Mr. Grillage," he began. "I—"

"See here!" was the brusque interruption. "If you knew me a little better you wouldn't make a break like that. When I ask a man to loosen up he loosens, and that's all there is to it. Dump it out—all of it."

David hesitated no longer. The secret would be published far and wide in a day or two at most, so nothing mattered much. In a few words he told the story of the threatening catastrophe, exaggerating nothing, minimizing nothing.

Eben Grillage heard him through without interruption, shifting the chewed cigar from one side of his mouth to the other as he listened. But at the end of it he was scowling ferociously.

"Your father is the same kind of a tender-hearted fool he has always been!" he rapped out. "Sat through an hour-and-a-half dinner with me and never once opened his head about this bog-hole he's mired in!" Then he dragged out his watch. "We've got barely fifteen minutes. You go and get Judson, the equipment man, on the phone while I do a bit of pen-scratching. Jump for it!"

David Vallory obeyed blindly, with his brain in a whirl. It took several of the hastening minutes to locate Judson at his home in the northern suburb; and when the connection was finally made, the hotel

porter was calling the Chicago train and Eben Grillage was at the desk, paying his bill and growling out orders about his hand-baggage.

A moment later David had handed the telephone receiver to Grillage, and was listening mechanically to the big man's half of the conversation.

"Yes, this is Grillage. No, I don't want to talk about the shipment; I want to know where you do your banking. With the Middleboro National, you say? Well, this time you'll do it through my bank—the Middleboro Security. Get that? Attach your draft to bill of lading and give it to Adam Vallory. Otherwise you don't get your money. That's all. Good night."

"Train-time, Mr. Grillage," interrupted the hotel clerk in his most deferential tones.

"That's all right; you hold that bus until I get ready!" snapped the departing guest. Then, thrusting a slip of paper into David's hand: "Take that to your father, with my love. And a word to you, my boy," in a rumbling aside. "After this phone talk of mine with Judson gets handed about, your father will have all the credit he needs; but, just the same, if you've got the level head that you seem to have, you'll stand by and wind this bank business up, once for all.

"Your father's too blamed good to be a banker in any such wicked world as the one we're living in. Dig up a smart lawyer, push these crooked borrowers to a settlement, and see if you can't screw enough out of it to square up and leave your father and sister with something to live on. When it's done, you let me know by wire, and I'll give you a job where you can make good if you've got it in you. That's all. Tell your father good-by for me. I sha'n't have time to stop at the bank."

It was not until after the crazy omnibus had rattled away, bearing Vignaux's single departing guest in galloping haste for the train, that David Vallory ventured to glance at the slip of paper which had been thrust into his hands.

For an instant the figures on it dazzled him, and he had a rush of blood to the head that made the electric lights in the

hotel lobby coruscate and take on many-colored halos.

The slip of paper was Eben Grillage's personal check on a Chicago bank for one hundred thousand dollars!

CHAPTER III.

AN HONORABLE DISCHARGE.

DAVID VALLORY lost little time in crossing the square from Vignaux's to the bank corner; in fact, he was boyish enough to run. In the bank he found his father relocking the vault after having given the frightened farmer his money.

"Is your heart-action still good, dad?" he burst out excitedly. "If it is, you may take a look at this!" handing the check of salvation to the vault-closer.

Adam Vallory held the bit of paper up to the electric bulb, saw the figures and the signature, and sank into a chair, shaken and tremulous.

"David!" he gasped reproachfully. "Did you tell him?"

"I did. Since it was evident you hadn't told him, I tried to dodge, but it was no use. Mr. Eben Grillage is not a man to be denied when he goes after anything. He said I was to give you that check with his love; that was after he had asked me to call Judson on the phone for him, and had told Judson that the Middleboro Security was *his* bank, and that he must draw through you for the money to pay for the shipment of scrapers and dump-cars. He said it so the people in the hotel lobby would hear and know that he is backing you. Isn't that the finest bit of loyalty you ever heard of?"

"This money—it is a loan, David; we mustn't forget that it is only a loan, to us, no matter how he regards it. But shall we ever be able to pay it back?"

The younger man had perched himself upon the bookkeeper's high stool, and he had his answer ready.

"You have been doing all the scrapping thus far, dad, but now you must let me take my turn. We'll let the old ship go decently and honorably ashore, and then get out and save the pieces. We'll pay Mr.

Grillage back all we can save out of the wreck, and beyond that we'll owe him a debt of gratitude that will be canceled only when we are both under the sod.

"That is the way I feel about it. I don't care what other people say about his business methods: I'd walk up to the cannon's mouth for him this minute. He has done this for you, individually, and I don't figure in it at all; but just the same, he has laid an obligation upon me that I shall never forget!"

For a long minute Adam Vallory sat with his face hidden in his hands. When he looked up it was to say: "You are bone of my bone, David, and I thank God for a son who can see eye to eye with me at a time like this. What you say is all true; we must never forget. If the time should ever come when Eben Grillage hasn't another friend on earth, he must still be able to count upon you and me. It will be you, in the last analysis; I am old and out of the running. The debt of gratitude will be yours to carry."

"I'll carry it, dad," was the quick response. Then: "If you are not too tired, let's get to work and make our plans before we sleep. To-morrow morning you are going to turn the business part of it over to me and let me save what I can."

Deep into the night the father and son sat together in the private room at the rear, poring over the books and the bank paper, and setting things in order for the speedy beaching of the outworn business ship. But it was not until they were walking together through the deserted streets to the house in the hill suburb that David Vallory won his final point.

"You will do as you think best, David," the father conceded, closing an argument which had begun at the very outset of the planning. "If it were left to me, I should probably be too easy with the bank's debtors, as I have always been. Retain Oswald, if you see fit; only don't let him be too hard with the borrowers."

The following day saw the beginning of the end for the oldest banking institution in the county. At nine o'clock the anxious withdrawals began again, but in an hour or two the tide turned.

Acting under Oswald's advice, the Vallorys had posted a notice in the bank window to the effect that the Middleboro Security was going out of business, and inviting all who had claims upon the bank to present them and get their money. But coincidentally a rumor spread about that Eben Grillage, currently spoken of as a multimillionaire by his former townsmen, was backing Adam Vallory.

The effect was magical, and by noon many of those who had withdrawn their savings were coming back to furnish an object-lesson in the mutability of human nature by begging Adam Vallory to stay in business and reinstate them as depositors.

Early in the afternoon David Vallory persuaded his father to go home, and himself took the chair at the president's desk, with Oswald at his elbow. By evening a good beginning had been made and the tangle was simplifying itself.

"Time is the thing we need to save, Bert," David urged, as they went together to Vignaux's for their belated dinner. "Dad is needing a rest mighty bad, and I've got to strike out and do something for myself. But I can't go until after things are wound up properly and dad and Lucille are provided for in some shape. How long is it going to take?"

The young attorney reserved his reply until after they had found their places in the café and given their dinner order.

"It will probably take more time than you will care to give to it," he estimated. "But we ought to be able to shake you loose in a few days, after we have closed the doors and brought the business down to a matter of routine settlement with debtors and creditors. I can handle most of that myself, as the bank's counsel."

In accordance with this outline of Oswald's, David Vallory stood by for the few days, taking his father's place, and doing what he could to hasten the beaching of the Security ship. The end came when the last depositor had checked out his account and Winkle had closed his wicket for the final time. Only the deferred collections remained, and these were turned over to Oswald.

In the evening of this climaxing day,

David Vallory and the young attorney were once more dining together in Vignaux's café.

"You are foot-loose at last, David, and I imagine you are glad of it," remarked the attorney after the waiter had taken their order. "You've buckled down to it like a man."

"There was no reason why I shouldn't buckle down," was the quiet answer. "That is what a man's son is for, isn't it?"

"I know; but a good many sons don't see it in that light. You have had every reason to believe that you were born with a silver spoon in your mouth, David; or at least a triple-plated one."

"I? Not in a thousand years!" laughed the son whose light was of the proper filial brightness. "I have known all along that the Middleboro Security would have to be wound up some time. Dad is all the fine things you can say of him, but he wasn't cut out for a banker. He knows it as well as anybody."

Oswald looked up questioningly. "You haven't any twinges of your own, David? It used to be the town's idea that you'd some day settle down and be Vallory number two in the banking business."

"Not a twinge," was the prompt response. "In another way, I am as incompetent as my father. Money handling doesn't appeal to me; it never has. I've always wanted to be an engineer and build something. If I had my choice I'd rather go out as a transit-man on some job worth while than to be the president of the biggest bank in the State. It's all in the way you're built."

"You are beginning at the bottom in your profession, aren't you?"

"Of course. Any man worth his salt begins that way. And that brings us down to the finances again. Have you carried the figuring far enough along to be able to guess at what will be left after all the bills are paid?"

Oswald's smile was half quizzical. "Your father hasn't taken either of us fully into his confidence," he suggested. "He insists that we must try to realize on the assets so as to have a hundred thousand dollars left to pay a personal debt

which doesn't appear on the bank's books. If we subtract even half that amount from the most favorable outcome possible, there will be nothing of any account left for him and your sister."

"It will be enough—with what I may be able to add to it," said the son, neither affirming nor denying the lawyer's hint that he was not entirely in his father's confidence.

"You are going out to look for a job?" asked Oswald.

"As it happens, I don't have to look. I leave for Chicago to-night, and my job is waiting for me."

"Good man!" approved the attorney. "Is it a secret?"

"Not at all. I am going to work for the Grillage Engineering Company. I'm to have an assistant engineer's billet on a bridge construction job in Wisconsin. There is a reason why I shouldn't take the job, and a still stronger reason why I can't refuse."

"Fine!" said Oswald, ignoring the qualifying part of the announcement. "Mr. Grillage and your father are old friends, aren't they?"

"Yes. They went to school together in the older Middleboro."

"You are lucky—or I guess you are. They do say that Mr. Eben Grillage is the limit when it comes to making money out of a contract. But as an engineer in the field, you won't have anything to do with that end of it."

David Vallory glanced up quickly with a little frown coming and going between his wide-set eyes.

"As I have just said, Bert, Mr. Grillage is my father's friend," he bit in crisply.

"Of course he is," was the placative reply. "I shouldn't have repeated the gossip—which is only gossip, after all. I suppose you remember his daughter Vinnie—as a little girl—don't you?"

"Very well indeed," said David Vallory with his eyes on his plate.

"She has grown up to be a raving, tearing, heart-smashing beauty," the lawyer went on, entirely unmindful of the sudden change in his table-mate. "I met her in Indianapolis last summer, when I was there

on a business trip. She gave me exactly five minutes by the watch—which was all the time she could spare; all the time a dozen other fellows would let her spare. Somebody told me she was going to marry an English title."

"That is gossip, too," muttered David Vallory, still with his eyes on his plate.

"I suppose so. You can hear all sorts of things if you'll only hold your ears open."

"Coming back to routine things," said David Vallory, looking at his watch, "my time's up. I must go out home and pack my grip. Will you be at the train to see me off?"

"Surest thing in the world," said the young lawyer; and after David had gone, he went on eating his dessert with thoughtful deliberation, recalling, now that he had time to do so, David's cryptic remark about the reasons—still unexplained—for and against the new employment.

An hour later the two young men met again on the train platform at the railroad station. The Chicago express was bulletined fifteen minutes late. During the hour of preparation and leave-takings at home, David Vallory had been trying to steel himself to the saying of a thing which must be said to Oswald before the final opportunity should be lost.

Finding no way in which to lead up to it, and having a just appreciation of the shortness of the time, he went about it rather bluntly.

"Bert, there is a thing I wish to speak about—that I've got to speak about—before I go away. You have been a mighty good friend to us in this shake-up, and we shall always owe you a lot more than we can pay. But I'm obliged to be a sort of dog in the manger right at the last. I have a sister, and she is blind."

"Well?" said Oswald, and his voice was a trifle thick.

"You know what I ought to say—what I want to say, and can't. Lucille isn't like other girls; she can't be. And yet she is just as human as other girls. You mustn't go to the house so often, Bert. If you do, there'll be an explosion some day, and you'll never get over being sorry."

"I—I don't know what you mean," was the low-toned reply.

"Then I'll have to tell you in so many words, brutal as it may sound. With her affliction, Lucille can't marry, and she—oh, dammit it all—you know what I mean!"

"Do I?" queried the other man in the same thick voice. "Perhaps I do, and perhaps I don't. You might make it a little plainer, if you care to."

The belated train had whistled for Middleboro, and the roar of its coming was already filling the air of the calm July night with thunderous murmurings.

"I will make it plainer. The little sister has taken you on as a friend. But at the same time, you are the only man who has ever taken the trouble to make her life a little more bearable. Let it stop at that, Bert; for God's sake, let it stop at that, if you don't want to break her heart!"

The train was in, the conductor was calling: "All aboard," and the Pullman porter had opened his vestibule. Oswald crossed the platform with David Vallory in sober silence, but at the hand-gripping instant he found his tongue.

"You go to your job and rest easy, David. I'm the last man on God's green earth who will ever do anything to break your sister's heart. Good-by—and let me hear from you."

CHAPTER IV.

THE HENCHMAN.

THE great concrete railroad bridge at Coulée du Sac was nearing completion, and for David Vallory, who had spent a summer, autumn, and a good part of the winter on the job, the closing scenes of the Middleboro near-catastrophe were withdrawing into a past which was already beginning to take on the characteristics of remoteness.

In its general aspects the interval had been uneventful, or at least unexciting; long working days made short by a keen love for his chosen profession; the goodwill, early won, of his associates on the engineering staff; a word of approval now

and then from his chief, Grimsby, a rather saturnine man-driver who seemed to enjoy the fullest confidence of Eben Grillage.

During this protracted interval, Vallory had met the contractor-king only a few times—and the king's daughter not at all. From Eben Grillage, himself, he had learned that Virginia had spent the summer touring with a party of friends in the greater America; that she had spent the shooting season with other friends in the Adirondacks, and that she had gone to Florida late in the autumn to escape the northern winter.

For himself, however, David Vallory had been given the best of proof that he had not been merely placed and forgotten. There had been an offering of ample opportunity to show what was in him, with pay-roll advancements to fit; and on a day when Grimsby, the saturnine chief of construction, called him into the bridge office for a consultation, he was given fresh evidence that the Rubicon of apprenticeship had been fairly crossed.

"You are a rising young man in the profession, Vallory, and if you keep on as you've begun, you'll come out at the top of the heap," was the complimentary phrase with which the interview began. "You are not like most of the young fellows I've had to hammer into line; you don't go around firing off the proposition that you know it all."

"I should hope not," said David Vallory, with becoming modesty. "There's a lot to learn, and I am only at the beginning of it."

"We're all learning," said the chief brusquely. "About the use of reinforced concrete as a substitute for masonry in heavy structures, for example, we're all more or less in the apprentice stage. And because we are, I imagine we all go pretty wide on the side of safety, don't you?" Then, with an abrupt break: "Have a cigar and sit down."

David Vallory found a three-legged stool and nodded acquiescence to the general postulate that the knowledge of concrete as a building material was as yet but a babe in arms.

"On that very point we have been hav-

ing more or less trouble with the railroad people all along, as you know," Grimsby went on. "We may admit that we don't know all there is to be known about concrete; but neither do the railroad company's engineers. Their inspectors are a set of cranks; that is the kind of man that is always put on the job to watch the contractors. If we lived up to the specifications as they'd like to make us, we'd come out about a mile deep in the hole."

Vallory nodded again. From time to time he had had troubles of his own with the watch-dog inspectors representing the railroad company for which the bridge was being constructed.

"You younger fellows are fresh from the laboratories, and you have the latest word in the experiment," said Grimsby, making his frontal attack without further preface. "You are loyal to your salt, aren't you, Vallory? You ought to be, you know."

"I hope I am," returned the loyalist, a little at loss to prefigure Grimsby's object. Then he added: "I owe Mr. Grillage a greater debt than I can ever pay, if that is what you mean."

"That's the talk! Now we can get down to business. Esher, the high-brow railroad chief, has just thrown out that last shipment of cement on us; says it doesn't test up to standard in the railroad laboratory. It's all poppycock, of course! Some little-boy chemist on the railroad pay-roll has made a blunder—that's all. Have you been keeping in touch with your college?"

"Fairly well; yes."

"Stand in with the professors in the college cement laboratory?"

"Yes; I know them all."

"Good. This shipment of cement that I'm talking about is the material Shubrick was to have used in the underwater work on Pier Four. We'll have to do a little juggling, but I want you to satisfy yourself beforehand. Take samples of the cement, just as it stands, and send them to your college for analysis. We'll keep Shubrick supplied out of the reserve stock until you get your answer. Better get the samples off to-day."

All this was purely routine, and Vallory,

who had thus been honored by the confidence of his chief, went about it as a part of the day's work. The samples were duly procured and forwarded to the university, with a personal letter explaining the reason for the requested analysis. An unbiased opinion was desired, and the letter-writer hoped it would be given promptly.

In a few days the answer came, and it was wholly satisfactory. The samples which had been submitted tested up to standard, and the college authorities were at loss to understand why any question had been raised as to the quality of the material. David Vallory showed the letter to Grimsby, and was rewarded by the hard-featured chief's nearest approach to a smile.

"Now for the necessary bit of juggling," was Grimsby's comment. "The railroad people have us by the short hair because we have to ship everything in over their line. But we'll fool 'em. Luckily, the cement mill isn't on their line. We shall send the condemned shipment out to-night, as if we were returning it to the mill. To-morrow morning you can slip out on the passenger-train and overtake the freight, say at Little River, on the F. S. and A., where we are building the power dam for the paper-mill."

David Vallory was staring out of the office window with a little frown wrinkling between his honest eyes. He could foresee what was coming, and though the cause seemed to be righteous enough, the expedient to which he was to resort bore all the earmarks of crookedness.

"And then?" he queried.

"Then you can take a few laborers off the dam—I'll give you an order to Bullock authorizing it—shift the cement into other cars, and fire it back here. When it comes in it will figure as a new shipment from the mill, and you'll have to doctor the railroad way-bills to make them fit."

It was the first time in his working experience that David Vallory had been asked to carry out a piece of deliberate trickery, though there had been other occasions when he had joined forces with the staff in hoodwinking the too-critical railroad inspectors.

Most naturally his point of view in these smaller deceptions had been that of the men

who figured with him, as Eben Grillage's paid henchmen; but this cement "juggling," as Grimsby had baldly named it, made him hesitate.

"It's a rotten shame that we have to get down to such methods," he protested, giving his innate straightforwardness a chance to be heard. "Let me go to Mr. Esher with the letter from Professor Luthe. That ought to convince him that we were not trying to put a spoiled batch of cement across on him."

Grimsby's smile was too well guarded to betray its real meaning. And what he said was only a half truth.

"Esher would turn you down cold. It's up to him to stand by his own laboratory, as a matter of course. I didn't ask you to get this analysis with any hope of convincing Esher with it; I merely wanted you to be satisfied in your own mind.

"You see what we're up against. If we have to throw away that shipment of Portland it will mean a good chunk of loss to the Grillage Engineering Company. You said you owed the big boss something; now's the time for you to prove that you meant it."

David Vallory stifled his qualms, and, a little later, carried out his instructions to the letter. The condemned material was shifted to other cars in the engineering company's own construction-yard at Little River, and in due course it came back to Coulee du Sac as a new shipment.

Just what was to be gained by the juggling, when the railroad officials would be certain to sample and test it again, was not very clear to David Vallory. But one night, a little farther along, he was given a shock of enlightenment.

The shock was administered by his bunk-shack mate, the engineer in charge of the under-water work in the caissons—Shubrick by name, and by training a man who had grown accustomed to many shifts in that branch of engineering which is fullest of fatalities.

To Shubrick David Vallory was freeing his mind on the general subject of over-critical inspection on the evening in question, when they were both chanced to be off duty at the same hour.

"These railroad watchers are getting on

my nerves more and more all the time!" he complained. "They act as if they think we are a bunch of crooks, needing only half a chance to scamp this job so that it will fall into the river with the first train that passes over it. Do they worry you on the under-water work as much as they do us on the concreting?"

Shubrick grinned ferociously.

"I'd shut off the air and drown a few of 'em if they did. Just the same, David, they're onto their job, all right. You needn't make any mistake about that."

"Just what do you mean by that. Do you think we need watching?"

This time Shubrick's grin took a sardonic twist.

"When you are a bit older, you'll know a heap more, David. Good Lord, man! are you running away with the idea that this contracting company is doing business for the fun of it?"

David Vallory shook his head. "You'll have to make it plainer. We're not angels, I suppose; but neither are we a gang of thieves to be watched and harried from one day's end to another."

"It's a fight," said the older man cynically. "The other fellows tie us up with a lot of specifications that they know perfectly well would ruin us if we should live up to them; and, on our side, we live up to just as few of them as the law will allow. You may have had the honor system in college, but it doesn't get by to any extent in business. As far as that goes, you yourself are not as innocent as you look, David. You worked that little cement racket the other day to the queen's taste."

"You heard about that?" said David Vallory; and it was a mark of the short distance he had gone on the road to equivocation that his color rose.

"Everybody knows about it—everybody but the railroad people. You played it mighty fine. What is puzzling me is how you contrived to get the railroad way-bills doctored on the F. S. and A."

The flush came again under David Vallory's eyes. The misleading explanation he had made to induce the railroad agent to rebill the condemned cement as a mill shipment to be transferred from the work on

the dam to that on the bridge was the least defensible part of the transaction.

"The least said about that part of it is the soonest mended," he returned shortly.

"It was a neat little trick all the way around," the under-water boss commented. "If Congdon hadn't fallen down in the first place we wouldn't have had to work it."

This was new ground to David Vallory, and he said so. "What did Congdon have to do with it?" he asked.

Shubrick relighted his pipe, and after a puff or two: "Do you mean to tell me that you don't know?"

"If I knew, I wouldn't ask."

Again the under-water engineer sucked slowly at his pipe. "There is one of two things, David," he remarked, after a pause: "You are either a good bit deeper than I've been giving you credit for, or else you are too innocent to be running around without a guardian. Didn't Grimsby tell you how it all happened?"

"He told me that some railroad chemist had blundered in making the tests."

Shubrick's laugh was soundless. "Our man Congdon was the one who blundered. After he had made the test in our own laboratory, he was ass enough not to see it that the railroad chemist didn't get a chance at the stuff."

"Are you trying to tell me that the cement wasn't up to standard?" demanded Grimsby's accessory.

"If you need to be told, it's a 'second,' as I supposed you knew; a bit slow-setting and otherwise off color, but nobody will ever know the difference after it is in place in the bottom of the river."

For a moment the air of the small bunk-shack became stifling, and David Vallory got up and went to the door. When he turned back to Shubrick it was to say: "Then the whole thing was a frame-up, was it—to enable us to run in a cheaper grade of Portland in a place where it couldn't show up?"

"Of course it was. We have to play even when we can."

"But I had that shipment analyzed myself. I sent samples of it to Professor Luthe at the university."

"Then you took your samples from the

wrong sacks, that's all. I'm using the stuff in the caisson, and I guess I know what I'm talking about. It's punk."

"If that is so, why haven't the railroad people found it out in a second test?"

"That's easy; this time Congdon was on the job and saw to it that they got the right kind of samples. You needn't look so horrified. The bridge isn't going to tumble down."

But more important things than bridges were tumbling down in David Vallory's heart and mind at that moment. When a young man has grown up in an ethical atmosphere the first broad step toward the unethical is apt to be subversive of many things. After a time he said:

"Shubrick, the frame-up wasn't altogether on the railroad people; part of it was on me."

The under-water man shook his head. "Grimsby merely wanted to let you down easy, and to leave you a good, broad hole to crawl out of in case there should be any future to the thing. But if you are really stirred up about it, you're foolish. We are fighting for our own hand. The golden rule is pretty to look at, but it doesn't hold water in business."

"Which is your way of saying that we are dealing with a condition and not a theory?"

"Precisely. A man has got to be loyal to something, Vallory. I'm loyal to my bread and butter; so, too, in the long run, are you, and ninety-nine other men out of a hundred. Possibly it digs a little deeper with you. Haven't I heard you say that you'd go a good bit out of your way where Mr. Grillage's interests are concerned?"

"You have."

"There it is, then. No man living has even been able to draw the line absolutely between ethical right and wrong. I'll put it up to you. If you are a fanatical crank your duty is plain. You know the inside of this cement deal, and you can show it up if you want to, and make it cost the Grillage Engineering Company a pot of money."

"But you're not going to do any such asinine thing. You are going to tell yourself that the particular grade of Portland used is merely a matter of opinion between our

staff and the railroad's, and let it go at that."

It is altogether improbable that Warner Shubrick regarded himself as in any sense an *advocatus diaboli*; and it might be even farther afield to suppose that Grimsby had given him a hint to safeguard the cement fraud by trying to justify it for his shack-mate.

None the less, the seed was sown, and a new point of view was opened for David Vallory. Hence, when he was summoned to Chicago, a few weeks later by the king of the contractors, he went with a light heart, half forecasting another promotion, and wholly jubilant over the thought that he might again be permitted to divide time, at least for one evening, with Virginia Grillage's retinue of court-payers.

CHAPTER V.

A REWARD OF MERIT.

IT was after office hours when David Vallory reached Chicago, arriving in obedience to the telegram from headquarters, and he was preparing to go to a hotel for the night when a brisk young fellow in livery singled him out to tell him that Mr. Grillage's car had been sent for him.

In the waiting automobile, to his unbounded surprise and delight, he found Miss Virginia. The lapse of three-quarters of a year had only made her more ravishingly beautiful in David's eyes, and his welcome was all that he could ask.

"You ought to feel highly honored," she said, making room for him in the handsome limousine. "I ran away from a houseful of people to come in town for you." And then, lest he should be too unreasonably happy: "It is *so* good to be reminded of dear old stuffy Middleboro again!"

"I wish I might remind you of something besides Middleboro," David complained, laughing. "Of myself, for example. Do you realize that it is nearly a year since we last met?"

"I do, indeed. Also, I realize that you have never by any chance written a line or happened to come to Chicago during the times when I have been at home."

"I have been working for wages, and I've had a laudable ambition to earn them honestly," said David, matching her rallying mood. Then as the car began threading its way through the traffic to the northward: "Where are you taking me?"

"Home, to the Maples."

"To the houseful of people? I shall disgrace you!"

"No clothes?" she suggested, with a smile that made him tingle to his finger-tips.

"Absolutely nothing to wear."

"You poor working man!" she sympathized. "I shall tell them all that they are lucky not to have you in brown duck and lace boots. But you won't have any chance to be social, unless it's at dinner. Father will monopolize you."

"What is he going to do—fire me?"

The limousine had reached the northward lake drive, and the king's daughter pressed the bell-push for more speed. "Dinner will be waiting," she explained; then she answered his question. "It is a state secret, of course; but I really think you *are* going to be 'fired.'"

"That is a comforting thing to be told—just before dinner!" was the laughing rejoinder. "But never mind my obsequies; tell me about yourself. Is the English lord still hovering on the horizon?"

"Cumberland—what do you know about him?"

"I heard last summer that you were going to marry him."

"When I do you shall have an invitation to the wedding—for the sake of the old boy-and-girl times in Middleboro. Won't that console you?"

"I am consoled speechless; weddings and funerals always affect me that way."

There were some miles of this light-hearted foolishness; brief miles, to be sure, since the big limousine was both powerful and speedy. At the end of the miles the car turned in past the gate-lodge of a lake-side estate, an establishment princely in extent, landscaping and architecture; and the gap which a disparity in worldly possessions digs between hope and fruition suddenly loomed wide for David Vallory.

"Why the profound silence?" inquired the princess of the magnificences.

"Too much money," he returned, half playfully, waving an arm to include the lavishness. "I was wondering what it means to you individually."

"I have often wondered myself," was the sober rejoinder. "Sometimes I think it means a lot. But there are other times when I'm obliged to run away from it, just to convince myself that I am not one of the lay-figures in the stage-setting. Can you understand that?"

Her answer gave David another of the ecstatic little thrills. It was not the first time that she had let him see that the frank, clear-sighted little girl of his boyhood adulation had been only overlaid, and not spoiled, by the lavishness.

"I can understand it perfectly," he assured her. "Money is only a means to an end."

The limousine was drawing up to the carriage entrance of the great house, and they had but a moment more of the comradely isolation. It was the young woman who seized it.

"Always remember that, David—and let it be clean money," she said in low tones; and then, with a swift reversion to the playful mood: "Here we are, just in time for dinner. I shall introduce you to the houseful as my foster-brother; and after dinner you may go your way with father and get yourself properly fired."

Drawing pretty heavily upon the simplicities, David Vallory won through the social introduction to the evening without calling any great amount of attention to himself.

Miss Virginia's "houseful" made an even dozen at the rather resplendent dinner-table, and the frankly inquisitive young wife of an elderly stock-broker, who had been assigned to David as his table-companion, and who kept him very busy answering childish questions about his profession, saved him from particularizing too curiously as to the others.

At the table dispersal he found himself at once in the clutches of the master of the house.

"Come into my den and we'll break away from all this hullabaloo," growled the king of the man-drivers; and when the

privacy was secured: "Pull up a chair and smoke. You'll find cigars in that humidor, or pipes and tobacco on the mantel. How did you leave the bridge?"

"We are working on the closing span, and two months more ought to see the trains running over it," David reported, settling himself in a deep chair with one of the long-stemmed pipes.

"Good!" grunted the big man. "We'll call it a back number for you and go on to something else. I've been letting you alone at Coulée du Sac; wanted to see what you were going to make of yourself without any of the helps or hindrances."

"I hope I haven't disappointed you," said David.

"You haven't; if you had, you wouldn't be here. Are you ready to tackle something bigger than an assistant's job on a concrete bridge?"

"I'll tackle anything you give me, though I'm not asking you to push me any faster or any farther than the good of the service will warrant."

"Don't you worry about that, young man," was the gruff rejoinder. "You'll never get any plums from me merely because you happen to be Adam Vallory's son. For that matter, the shoe's on the other foot; I'm thinking about giving you a hard job—a damned hard job. What do you know about the Nevada Short Line new-alignment project out in the Timanyoni country?"

David shook his head. "Nothing more than the technical articles in the engineering journals have told me."

"Well, it's a sizable job, and we have the contract. We had a fellow named Lushing out there as chief, but I had to let him go."

"Incompetent?" said David.

"No; competent as the very devil. But he wretched—allowed himself to be bought up by the railroad company."

"How was that?"

"Just plain disloyalty to his salt: chummed in with the railroad staff; took favors, and all that; any time he wanted a special to run down to Brewster for a night off, he got it—and we paid for it."

Having his late experience in view, David Vallory understood perfectly. With such a

man as Lushing in charge for the contractors there would naturally be no cutting of corners on the hard-and-fast specifications; no saving of money for the Grillage treasury.

"It has always seemed to me that plain business loyalty is one of the things you buy, or ought to buy, with the salaries you pay," was his disposal of the Lushing case.

"Lushing is a nice dog, and he has proved it by going over to the railroad engineering staff," growled the man-driver. "What do you think about that—going over to the other side and carrying with him all the information that his job with us has given him?"

David Vallory was by this time sufficiently partizan to lose sight of the fact that a discharged man might be excused for taking any place that might offer. "It was unprofessional, at least," was his comment.

"There was more to it than that, but we needn't go into the whys and wherefores," Grillage went on, with a portentous frown corrugating his heavy brows. "I let him go, and for a month or more we've been rocking along without a chief, and with a man against us who knows all the tricks of the trade. I called you in to ask if you think you're big enough to hold up our end of the pole. Grimsby says you are."

David Vallory caught his breath. It was a tremendous promotion, and he was wise enough to discount his own lack of experience.

"I'm only an apprentice, as you might say, and many a man with my equipment is still carrying a transit," he said, after the momentary pause for breath-catching. "But if you think I'm equal to it, I can only say that I'll do my best not to disappoint you."

The big man's laugh was like the creaking of a rusty door-hinge. "You're modest, David, and that isn't the worst thing that can happen to a young fellow in his beginnings. But I've been keeping cases on you, and I go a good deal on what Grimsby says. He gives you a good send-off—says you know the engineering game and can handle men.

"That's about all the job will ask for—barring the loyalty you talk about. If you need an older head you'll have Plegg, your

first assistant. Plegg has the age and the experience, and you can lean on him for everything but the initiative—which is the one thing he hasn't got. Now we'll get down to the layout," and he took a roll of blueprints from its case and began a brittle outlining of the big job.

David Vallory, still a little dazed by the suddenness and the magnitude of the promotion, bent over the spread-out drawings and became a sponge to soak up the details. In the construction of the Nevada Short Line over the western Timanyonis in the day of the great gold discoveries, haste had been the watchword of the builders.

With the golden lure ahead to put a premium upon speed, the engineers had eliminated cuts, fills and tunnels, so far as they could, and had made the line climb by a series of reversed curves and heavy grades to the surmounting of the obstacle mountain range at Hophra Pass.

But now, since the Short Line had become an integral part of the great P. and S.-W. System, a campaign of shortening and grade-reducing had been set on foot. There were bridges to be built, hills to be cut through, tunnels to be driven.

Powder Can, a mining town nestling in the shadow of the range, was the center of the activities, but the work extended for some miles in either direction from the town, up and down the gorge of the Powder River, with the heaviest of the hill-cutting and tunnel-driving climaxing in the big bore which was to form the needle's eye for the threading of the main range.

Again modestly discounting his lack of experience, David Vallory was doubtful of his ability to plan and carry out such a vast undertaking from its inception. But the trail was already broken for him, and he had only to walk in the technical footsteps of his predecessors.

"I'm your man, Mr. Grillage," he said, after the plans had been duly considered. "I'll lean on Plegg, as you suggest, and give you the best there is in me. I'll say frankly that I don't believe I'm big enough yet to have taken it as a new proposition. But with the lay-out all made and the work in progress, I ought to be able to pick it up and carry it to the finish."

"That's up to you," said the big man shortly. "You may take this set of blueprints with you and check yourself into the job on the train. Grimsby says you're good for the engineering end of it, and I'm taking his word for that. But there is another angle that you mustn't lose sight of. It's a big job and there were a dozen bidders. We had to cut close to get in, and any bad breaks on our part are going to shove the profits over to the other side of the books and write 'em down in red ink."

"There mustn't be any bad breaks," said David succinctly.

"That's the talk; and more than that, we must shave all the foolish frills out of the specifications. You know how that goes, or if you don't Matt Grimsby hasn't done his duty by you. On a job like this, the railroad engineers would have us gold-plate every spike we drive, if they could. You've been in the contracting business long enough now to know what I mean."

"I shall be working for the Grillage Engineering Company first, last and all the time," David asserted.

At this, the gruffness fell from the big man in the opposite chair as if it had been a displaced mask.

"There spoke your father, David, and a better man never lived. I was only trying you out a while back when I said you needn't look for the plums just because you happen to be Adam Vallory's son. After you get a little farther up the ladder and find that you have to depend on the man lower down you'll be willing to pay high for a little personal loyalty of the sort that looks an inch or two beyond pay-day.

"I'm putting you right where I'd put a son of my own, if I had one, out yonder in the Timanyonis, boy—and for the same reason. I want to have somebody on the job that I can bank on and swear by."

It was the one touch needed to put the fragrant flower of personal relationship upon the juggler-grown tree of promotion. David Vallory was still young enough to take the oath of allegiance gladly to any master strong enough and generous enough to command his loyalty, and Eben Grillage could have found no surer way to light the fires of blind passion of fealty.

"A year ago, Mr. Grillage, you loaded me with the heaviest obligation a son can carry. You are adding to it now by giving me a promotion big enough to make me light-headed. I'd be a mighty poor sort of a man if I didn't—"

"Never mind the obligations," the master broke in, with a return to the brittle abruptness. "There's an old saying that the quickest way to make an enemy of a man is to do him a favor. If it isn't working out that way in your case, why, so much the better. Now you may go back to the dinner people, if you want to. I've got to dictate a bunch of letters." And the king pressed a push-button for his secretary.

Thus dismissed, David Vallory spent little enough of what was left of the evening in the manner in which he wished most to spend it; not being a devotee of bridge. But at the end of things, when hope was about to fold its wings and go to bed, Miss Virginia gave her place at the second table to the elderly broker's wife, and the patient waiter had his reward.

"Well, have you been properly fired?" asked the daughter of the lavishnesses, after they had passed out of ear-reach of the card-players.

"I imagine you know more than I can tell you about it," he bubbled happily. "I'm to take an early train in the morning and disappear—vanish into the western horizon."

"Are you sorry—or glad?"

"Both. I've had a promotion so big that it makes my head swim. But the place of it is a mighty long way from Chicago."

"You didn't make any use of the nearness to Chicago while you had it at Coulée du Sac," she caviled. Then: "Are you starting west without going to see your father and sister?"

"I was with them at Christmas. And I have a plan which has been simmering while I was waiting for you to get tired of the bridge-table. If the accommodations in the Timanyoni region are at all possible, I shall send for dad and Lucille."

"The accommodations are good. There is a summer-resort hotel with cottages on the ridge opposite Powder Can."

"You have been there?" David asked.

"Once; for a few weeks last autumn when the work was just starting. But won't that be a rather violent change for your father and sister—from sleepy old Middleboro?"

"Possibly; but there are reasons. Dad isn't entirely well. His heart was never in the banking business, but just the same, the breaking of all the old routine is hard for him. A change will do him good."

"You said 'reasons,' and that is only one," she prompted.

"There is another. How much do you remember about my sister?"

"Only that she was blind, and perfectly angelic, and the most delicately beautiful child that ever breathed."

"She is all those things yet, only more so. Do you remember Bert Oswald?"

"Oh, yes; quite well. He is a lawyer now, isn't he?"

"Even so. Worse than that, he is in love with Lucille, and—er—I'm much afraid she is with him—without realizing it, you know. It's a pitiful misfortune for both of them. Of course, Lucille can't marry."

"Why do you say 'of course'?"

"With her affliction? She doesn't dream of such a thing! Bert has been very decent about it; I put him on his guard last summer before I left Middleboro, and he hasn't spoken—yet. But the day may come when he will speak, and then, as I told him, there will be trouble and a lot of useless wretchedness. If the folks are not where Bert can drop in every few minutes, it will be different."

For a time the daughter of profitable contracts did not comment on the plan, but when she did there was a touch of her father's shrewd directness in her manner.

"You are frightfully cold-blooded," she asserted. "If you had ever been in love yourself, you wouldn't talk so calmly about separating these two. What if Lucille is blind? There have been blind wives since the beginning of time. You're hard-hearted."

"No," said David; "I'm only trying to be the right kind of a brother. And your argument falls down at the other end, too."

You say if I had ever been in love myself; that has already happened to me, Virginia."

Her laugh was perfectly care-free. "And you never told me!" she mocked. "Does she live in Middleboro? Or have you broken all the traditions by keeping faith with a college widow?"

"No, she doesn't live in Middleboro, and I am very certain she has never been a college widow. It's only a pipe-dream for me, as yet, but some day—"

"Some day she will grow tired of waiting and marry somebody else," was the brisk retort. "Is she pretty?"

"No, that isn't the word."

"Beautiful, then?"

"So beautiful that I can't look at her without going fairly dotty."

Again she laughed derisively. "You seem to have all the symptoms, and I didn't believe it of you, David. You have always seemed so solid and sensible."

"I am both," he boasted gravely. Then in a quick shift to safer ground: "You told me once that you enjoyed going out on the work with your father; is there any chance that you will come to the Timanyoni this summer?"

"I was there last year, as I told you; it is an old story to me now."

"But sometimes we like to reread old stories. Besides, there is going to be a new chapter added when I take hold."

"Are you going to reform things?"

"If they need reforming, yes."

"I wish you might say that, knowing what you say and meaning it," she threw in half musingly.

"Is that meant to be a riddle?" he asked.

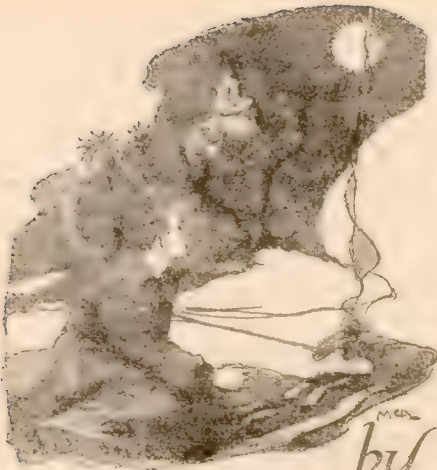
"Perhaps; but I'm afraid you are not going to find the answer to it."

The bridge-players were rising, and there was a sputtering of motor-cars outside.

"Have I got to let you go without telling me the answer," David protested.

"Yes; you must find it out for yourself, if you can—and will. You say you are leaving early in the morning? Then I will say good night and good-by. Give my love to your father when you write, and don't, for pity's sake, drag him and your sister away out yonder to the edge of nowhere!"

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)



The Arab

by Denzil C. Lees

THE magic of the Oriental evening crept over Bagdad, the city of Arabic fable and fantastic charm. A pink light touched the ancient houses and mosques, a lingering dream-light which rested tenderly. The sky was dull-red and gold, dipping at the eastern horizon into livid purple, as the sun, an angry, red ball of fire, was pushed slowly over the edge of the desert by the soft, cool hand of advancing night.

Upon a high veranda of a three-story house, which overlooked a great part of the city, stood a man and a girl enthralled with the mystic hour. Many sounds from the streets below stole up through the ethereal spaces to them without piercing their thoughts.

At last the girl turned to the man and was about to speak when she suddenly changed her mind. It was the expression on her companion's face that caused her to remain silent.

The man did not seem to notice her move. He was staring beyond the city toward the sleepy solitudes of the desert. The mounting colors of the setting sun reflected on his face and gave it a coppery hue. His eyes glowed as though little fires burned in them.

The girl knew his thoughts were far away. He towered above her. She suddenly felt a resentment toward him—that he was neglecting her, ignoring her presence, so that she felt a thing apart. But why should she feel so, she reflected. After

all, he was only an Arab, and between him and her there was an impassable gulf.

Yet, from the first, this man had held a strange, fascinating influence over her. She liked to be in his presence. She felt that a weird sense of mystery surrounded him. He was so different from the jaunty, care-free men she had been accustomed to. He was always so very, very serious.

Now, as she watched him, with that quick womanly intuition she knew that she was in his thoughts in some strange way—that he saw something, knew something of which she was a part. She wanted to ask him what it was. But she still remained silent, for somehow she was afraid. It was all in that changing look—she had seen it several times before as he gazed toward the desert at sunset.

At last the man stirred slightly as his eyes turned upon the face of the girl, but still with that far-away look in them. Then, as with a sudden sense of realization that he was staring at her, their expression changed and he smiled down at her.

"So the man, Arnold Dale, told you that all Arabs are liars and thieves?" he said with a hollow, mirthless laugh. But there was a hint of pain in his voice.

The girl did not answer him. His remark came as a shock to her. That was the very thing on her mind at that moment. She had been wondering if it was true in every case, particularly with the man that stood at her side. For a moment her eyes lingered, trying to read his in-

scrutable face; then they traveled to the streets below, where many and varied figures passed and repassed in that slow, dignified swing of the timeless East.

There were Bedouin Arabs from the desert, their swarthy faces half-concealed behind their white kufeyahs, wandering along haphazard; evil-looking Circassians loaded down with well-filled cartridge belts; ragged, dust-covered Fellaheen, with their mouths agape at the sights; unbridled donkeys, and stately, lurching camels; copper-colored, unveiled women from the desert dressed in indigo-blue; veiled city women gliding furtively along, and now and then a tourist darting and jerking his way through the dreamy throng, a contrast, and out of place in that silent, unhurried procession.

To the girl, Daisy Sumner, the scene was a page out of the "Arabian Nights." She had come to Bagdad that spring with her father, John Claymore Sumner, a man of wealth, who was a searcher after Oriental curios and a student of the East. She had finished her college course when she was nineteen, that was two years ago. She was of medium height, with a perfect figure, clear complexion, deep blue eyes, and a glorious abundance of auburn hair. Her features were well formed, although she was not what one would have called pretty. There was always a freshness about her that reminded you of the first spring days.

She had importuned her father to take her back with him to Bagdad at the end of his six months' rest in the States. At first he had protested strongly at the idea, making excuses about the climate affecting her health and the risk of Arab uprisings. The romance and mystery surrounding the city of the "Arabian Nights"—which book she had read over and over while at school, picturing her father amid such scenes—had appealed to her nature. Her college chums called her romantic. John Sumner was a lonely man absorbed in his hobby. His wife had been dead ten years, and the thought of his daughter by his side swayed his judgment, and at last he had given way.

Again the girl's face lifted, this time over the house-tops toward the desert, as the silence of night, immense and swathing,

began to descend upon the city. The man at her side followed her gaze.

Beyond the edge of the city a long, snaky caravan was gliding slowly toward the desert. The sound of the camel bells reached them upon the still evening air. The dark figures of the drivers trudged beside their lazy moving beasts until, at last, they all disappeared over the ridge of the hills that hid the greater desert from view.

The purple mantle of night, which at last had come, pitted with myriads of blinking stars, awoke in Daisy Sumner that easily aroused sense of romance. She longed to follow those men and their beasts over the ridge of hills to see what was beyond.

She sighed and turned once again to the man at her side.

"What did you say that place was called beyond the ridge of hills?" she questioned, pointing to the place where the caravan had disappeared, and around which the river Tigris hid itself abruptly from view.

"It is called El Moharrekk," he replied simply, "and it means the 'Burning Place'!"

"What a strange name," she commented, with a note of interest in her voice.

"It is called that," replied the man, catching a sense of inquiry in her tone, "because it is the desert—the place to which men go—white men—and return either shriveled or purged. The desert is a searcher out of the evil and the good!"

Silence fell once more between them. The girl was pondering the man's last remarks. Ever since she had come to Bagdad she had been curious to see the other side of those hills. She had watched many caravans go over that ridge. The Bedouin Arabs, who came from the desert to sell their camels and to buy things in the bazaars, always disappeared again like fancies over that ridge.

The moon came up from the east and shimmered upon the river, which stretched half about the city now like a silver belt. The girl shivered slightly at the coming of the moon—it seemed to her to bring a sudden chilliness in the air.

"Yusuf—El—Essad," she said slowly, like a child reciting a lesson, addressing the man, "will you please bring me a wrap?

But, first, tell me if I pronounced your name correctly?"

The man nodded in the affirmative and turned to do her bidding.

"And what did you say was the meaning of it?" she broke in.

The Arab paused as he replied slowly and deliberately, his face unmoved: "Yusuf, means 'Joseph'; and El Essad, means 'The Lion.'"

For four years, since John Sumner had been coming regularly to Bagdad, Yusuf El Essad had been his right-hand man in Arabic affairs. The Arab had won the American's esteem and confidence, and the latter had allowed him the freedom of the house.

Since Sumner's daughter had arrived there had been no change. He had even gone so far as to ask the Arab to teach her the Arabic language.

No one would have known that Yusuf El Essad was an Arab, at first acquaintance. His skin was hardly more brown than that of any European after four or five years' exposure in the Orient. He nearly always dressed in European clothes. His manners were beyond reproach. He could speak English perfectly. He had been educated in an American college in Constantinople. He was an immense man, remarkably handsome, of powerful physique, and a superb horseman. He walked with the dignity and pride, which is the birthright of the Arab race.

Yusuf El Essad returned with the wrap, and, after placing it carefully on the girl's shoulders, turned once more toward the moonlit distance.

"How would you like to see over the ridge by moonlight?" he volunteered. "It is a wonderful sight, the first time, and we could be back in two hours."

Daisy Sumner started and stared at him in amazement. Again he had spoken her thoughts. He certainly perplexed her.

"I'll ask father if I may go," she said, after a pause, and hurried into the house.

The man's face paled slightly when she had gone. His eyes narrowed, and a peculiar smile passed over his face.

Perhaps, if she had seen that slow-changing expression, she might have altered her

mind about going with him that night. She came back, smiling, with the news that her father had given his permission.

The Arab bowed with ceremonious gravity, declaring that he would go down and have the horses saddled. He turned away with a sudden quickness of step, and an eager look came into his face. Daisy Sumner watched him, puzzled. She had never before seen that eager expression. His manner had always been slow and quiet.

After he had gone that vague sense of fear again came, but the clatter of the horses' hoofs in the courtyard below dispersed her momentary doubts, and she hastened into the house and changed her evening gown for a riding-habit.

The streets of the city were almost deserted except for the usual beggars and dogs. They passed a number of coffee shops, still open, where dreamy figures of turbaned Arabs sat and smoked their narghiles and conversed in low tones.

"What a lot of dogs there are!" remarked the girl as she watched them running here and there. "Have they any homes?"

"The streets are their homes," returned her companion. "You see them better now because there are not so many people about, and they come out more at night."

Suddenly her horse swerved to one side as a dark form appeared out of the shadows. When the figure came into the light of the moon she saw that it was a man dressed in semi-European clothes.

He paused a moment before the riders. His dark, wasted face peered up at them with eyes that were glazed and deathlike in the moonlight. Then he gave a sort of low mumble as he disappeared into a near-by doorway.

The girl shuddered, and a faint exclamation of alarm had passed her lips.

"Who—was that?" she said, stammering.

"He is a white man. He is what they call gone to the dogs!"

There was a hint of sadness in the man's tones.

The girl resented his remark and turned sharply on him:

"What do you mean?" she demanded.

He did not answer her immediately, but when he spoke there was a note of pity in his voice.

"Perhaps you do not know. It is a sad story! They are weak, some of these white men. The Oriental drugs are too much for them. Sometimes it is sorrow and loneliness that starts them with the drugs. They drift and drift down to the dogs in the streets."

The man's words and the sympathetic tone of his voice changed that sudden flash of resentment toward him. Daisy Sumner felt she had misjudged him. He bewildered her. There had been a chance to get back with a sarcastic thrust at the white race for the accusation that had been made against his own kith and kin; and he had refrained from even a hint of a sneer.

They rode in silence until, at last, they approached the ridge of hills, sand-strewn, silvery and desolate. A perceptible change had come over Yusuf El Essad. His face was solemn and set. When they reached the top of the ridge, for a moment Daisy Sumner held her breath. Then a cry of ecstasy escaped her lips:

"How wonderful!" she exclaimed. "I never expected to see anything like this," she went on. "It is almost a dream!"

The desert stretched before them, white, vast, and gleaming. The silvery ribbon of the river twisted its winding course to the horizon, reflecting an old ruined city on its banks. The broken columns of some ancient temples and palaces trained their black shadows over the sands.

The man at her side had not spoken. He had pulled his horse close up to hers. She felt him near her, and yet a part of that scene. Then she began again to feel that she was a strange and mysterious part of his thoughts. She turned to look at him.

He was gazing at her in a way that made her feel suddenly afraid, she knew not why. Her eyes traveled back to the great immensity before them. The desert seemed filled with an indescribable loneliness and a sense of danger. Then the man's voice reached her, soft and bewitching:

"It is there in the desert one sees the sun set and rise with the same glory that crowns your head, Miss Sumner. And the

sky at night looks down on the lonely man with the deep-blue tenderness of your eyes."

She was shocked at his personal allusions; he had never before talked that way.

He went on again after a pause, in which he seemed under some fearful struggle within, and his voice was now husky and faint. His breath came in short, quick gasps.

"But the desert is a deceiver, Miss Sumner, as the mirage. It is a place of bones, of unclean things, and the abode of devils!"

He stopped again, but continued speaking more rapidly and much louder as the girl shuddered at his words, with a new terror come over her.

"It is true what the man, Arnold Dale, said. All Arabs are liars and thieves, who fight and quarrel even, as the dogs they despise and curse in the streets of their cities, and it is worse out there in the desert, for the sands hide their deeds. But the desert is my home, where I was born. There I first met your father, he gave me water—I was dying—" His voice lowered almost to a whisper, but she caught the words: "How could I do such a thing—"

Then he laughed in an uncanny way.

Daisy Sumner shuddered perceptibly. A thought flashed across her brain that the man at her side was fighting a terrible temptation, and that the temptation involved her in some way. She felt the more afraid of him, afraid of the vast immensity, afraid of the ghostly desert moon. A mysterious warning seemed to have come to her unsought. She had an anxious desire to return home—and as soon as possible.

She turned her horse quickly, as though to run away, and in that moment it caught a foot in a hole in the sand and fell heavily forward.

The sudden turn of events appeared to affect the man, and brought him from his dreams with a jerk as he jumped from his horse and caught her before she fell. The horse rolled over, tried to struggle to its feet, then lay still, and she saw that one of its legs was broken.

"You will have to ride back with me," said the voice of the Arab at her elbow. She glanced up quickly with a feeling of thankfulness for her rescue. His face was calm and set, even as his voice.

She hesitated. But the Arab brought up his horse close to her, and bent to lift her into the saddle. She saw that his old, ceremonious gravity had returned, that he had adopted the attitude once more of a servant.

When she was comfortably seated in the saddle he mounted behind and they started off. He forced the animal into a gallop as they reached the level ground. The pace almost took her breath away. Once the horse stumbled and she called to him to go slower.

At last they neared the city. He stopped the horse and jumped to the ground.

"I was hurrying to get you back," he explained in an apologetic way. "You will remember that I promised to return within the two hours. You shall now ride alone. I will walk behind."

But Daisy Sumner thought that he had ridden so, as though he were fleeing from some terrible, unknown thing, as she noted the beads of perspiration on his brow and remembered his labored breathing.

She did not answer, but turned her horse into the street that led to the desert. She was confused—bewildered at all that had happened, but not once did she think unkindly or with any suspicion toward the man. She even admired him in a way more than ever.

But she wondered how she had ever allowed herself to go with him, she was sure that she had better never do such a thing again, at least not without her father present. However, she had learned something from him, that had made him somehow different in her eyes, that, despite the fact that he was an Arab, he could be trusted.

The next day Arnold Dale called to take her out in his car, the only automobile in Bagdad at that time, and a constant source of wonder to the natives. Arnold Dale was a wanderer and remittance-man, who had come to Bagdad for what he called a change. He met Daisy Sumner as soon as she arrived, and fell violently in love with her—if it was possible for him to fall in love with any one outside himself.

He was a tall, handsome fellow, but utterly selfish and weak. After three months of persistent courting they had come to some sort of understanding. But Dale

didn't feel quite sure of things, and he was more than anxious to settle matters in view of his debts and the serious complications pending on their account.

"I want to go out to the desert," said the girl, after they had started off. She was anxious to see what effect it would have on her in the daylight and with Arnold Dale by her side.

"The deuce, I can't take you out there, Daisy!" Dale replied in a bored way, "the car will get stalled in the sand."

"You never can do anything I ask," she returned petulantly; then added: "But I don't care—I was out there last night with Yusuf."

"Did your father know?" he asked.

"Of course, and, besides, there is no harm if he didn't; you're only jealous!"

"Jealous of an Arab?" he laughed, but there was a note of doubt in his tone. Then he continued, sincerity in his voice:

"Look here, Daisy, you've got to remember this above all else: Yusuf is an Arab—say what you like about his manners—and your father is much too easy, and I'll tell him so."

"You'll do nothing of the kind!" she rapped back. "Yusuf is a gentleman, and, besides, he is in father's employ. He is well paid for his work, and he is supposed to be our guide and interpreter."

"All Arabs are traitors," went on Dale. "No one who has any sense ever trusts an Arab. Once an Arab, always an Arab. They sit in the sand with the fleas, eat with their hands, and never take a bath."

"Hush!" interjected the girl. "Yusuf is different, and he knows how to treat an American girl; besides, he is in father's confidence."

"Yes, they have a way with the women, I know," he rattled on again after a pause. He was beginning to be alarmed about the girl's interest; he knew only too well that Yusuf El Essad was an exception.

"This fellow is no better than the rest; they are all alike when they get the chance. What things have happened out there in the desert! How many white women have been lured by their soft words and their eyes! Liars and thieves, I tell you, children of deceit!

"I'd sooner trust one of those yellow dogs, scavengers of the streets of Bagdad, than I'd trust that tall sphinx with his polished ways. You should hear how the Arabs in the bazaars talk about the white women because they go about unveiled.

"Daisy, Arabs are beasts where women are concerned. Do you know that an Arab does not believe that a woman has a soul? And, besides, I am told that Yusuf El Essad is the offspring of a derelict white man and an Arab woman."

"I don't want to ride with you any farther," she snapped. "You forget yourself talking to me in this way. Take me home, and don't come near me again until you can get over your silly jealous fits."

Dale said no more, but he turned the car back in the direction of the Sumner residence. When they reached the house Daisy Sumner whisked from the car, and, without a word or look at her companion, strutted away into the outer court.

"Oh, the devil! These temperamental girls!" muttered Arnold Dale as he jerked the steering-wheel and raced away. His mind dwelt on a possibility of getting rid of that Arab in some way—he had some sort of vague fear that the fellow might spoil his chance.

When Daisy Sumner entered her father's study on her way through the house she was surprised to see a man in semi-European clothes seated, talking with her father. He turned as she entered the room and looked at her in a pathetic way. His eyes looked unhappy and ill. He was a man of past middle age and looked to have seen better days. He gathered up his hat and some English newspapers from a chair and left the room almost immediately.

"Who is that man, father?" she said, after he had gone.

John Sumner did not answer her question at once; he was busy sorting some papers on his desk. At last he replied:

"Just a man who calls on business once a month, my dear."

"I thought—" she stopped short a moment, and then continued: "I have seen him once before. He startled my horse in the street the night I went with Yusuf for the ride to the desert."

John Sumner's gaze still lingered on his daughter, but he said nothing, and the incident passed without further comment.

Four days later Daisy Sumner and Yusuf El Essad were walking in the front courtyard of the house, discussing a proposed desert trip, when a man entered the place suddenly and came up to her companion.

She saw at once that it was the strange man she had last seen in her father's study. To-day he looked even more dejected. His eyes snapped at her companion as he spoke rapidly in Arabic.

She caught one word several times—*bakshish*—which she knew meant money. In the midst of his vehement words he paused and looked at her with an evil smile and nodded to her companion.

The latter became suddenly enraged. She had never seen him look so before. Then he appeared to grow calmer as he beheld her eyes upon him, and an expression of extreme sadness came into his face as he turned and handed the newcomer some money.

The man hurried away, chuckling.

After he had gone Daisy Sumners turned to the Arab.

"Who was that man?" she asked.

There followed a long pause. Then, with a smile upon his face as he bowed from her presence, the Arab replied, and the tone of his voice was full of supreme devotion: "My father!"

She stood amazed as her eyes followed the retreating figure. Then she recalled the words of Arnold Dale: "Yusuf El Essad is the offspring of a derelict white man and an Arab woman."

And so this was the secret of his heart, she reflected; but still she wondered that he could be so different, and a new sense of regard for him now came over her.

Long into the night as she lay awake Daisy Sumner pondered over the things concerning Yusuf El Essad. It was evident to her that her father knew all and was helping them both—dear old dad, he had always such faith in his fellow man—but one was indeed worthy and the other unworthy.

Suddenly in the stillness of the night she heard the sound of naked feet paddling on

stones. She held her breath, listening. Then a door was opened, and some one was moving about down-stairs. She thought perhaps it was her father, but presently heard his heavy breathing in the next room. Daisy was a girl without fear at night.

She clambered from her bed, threw on a robe, and, taking a small night light, descended the stairway. Whoever it was moved about in her father's study. She thought she heard a whispered conversation, which meant there were two or more people in there.

She crept to the door stealthily, her heart beating in her throat. The door was open. As she came to the entrance she suppressed a cry.

A man in an Arab's *abeyah* was busy gathering something together into a red cloth. The faint light she carried had flashed into the room, and the man turned his head toward her.

The light of the little lamp illumined her face, and but dimly the scene before her. It was Yusuf El Essad, his face horror-stricken and mute as he stared at the girl. The next moment he had dashed through the door on the opposite side of the room.

The girl still held control of herself, but a fearful pain smote her—the pain of lost faith—that this man, so different from the average of his race, had gone their way after all. Again Arnold Dale's words came back to her: "They are all alike when they get the chance."

One quick survey of the room told her that the safe had been broken open and there had been a robbery. She knew that her father kept a large sum of money in notes in that safe.

But she did not give the alarm; not that she wanted to shield the man; her mind was merely too troubled for any further commotion.

She crept quietly back to bed, bewildered and saddened, to toss through the rest of the night with her unhappy thoughts. But when she came down the next morning she had made up her mind that she would not tell of what she had seen during the night.

They had not stopped once since they left Bagdad after their successful robbery

the night before, Yusuf El Essad, the Arab, and Arnold Dale, the wanderer, and neither had uttered a single word in all that time. All day long their camels had swung forward through the heat waves that wriggled and writhed about them. The glare of the sand under the brazen sun was like the blast of a furnace. The vision of the distant sand hillocks rising and falling monotonously to the horizon had never changed.

But Yusuf El Essad, the Arab, had seen nothing but the back of the man who rode on the camel ahead of his. Not once had he removed his eyes, and in them there had appeared to grow slowly the fires of an inexorable hate.

At last the white man called a halt, and the camels went down on their knees with a grunt and a long-drawn-out sigh. A pink light from the sinking sun spread slowly over the dunes. Dale threw some provender to the camels and gave instructions to the Arab, in a whining, nasal voice, about making a fire and preparing supper, then sat down and began to smoke a cigarette.

An awful silence filled the desert, broken only by the slow, rhythmical *crunch-crunch* of the jaws of the feeding camels. Dale's gaze wandered to the west, where the sky looked like an enormous conflagration of red and yellow flames. Then he turned with a grunt as he muttered under his breath: "So may the debts burn!" It was some such expression as that muttered days before which had fallen upon the ears of the Arab and caused him to think, and to think deeply.

Then Dale got to watching the Arab in a half drowsy way as he moved about, preparing the evening meal. At last he gave another grunt and fairly yelled at the man, still in English, as he rolled up the sleeves of the *abeyah* Yusuf had provided for him as a disguise:

"Why don't you say something? Your infernal silence gets on my nerves!"

But the Arab did not reply. He was still thinking, though his eyes flashed an instant as they turned with a feline gleam in Dale's direction. One could see that Yusuf El Essad was a changed man.

After supper Dale lit another cigarette

and took out a bundle from the inner folds of his *abeyah*—the money stolen the night before from John Sumner's safe, wrapped in a red *kufeyah*; and it had been an easy task with the Arab's assistance.

Dale bent toward the fire before which he was seated, gripping the bundle in his hands. He, too, was a changed man. His face filled with an avaricious, gloating expression as his fingers felt the crispness of its contents. It looked more like the face of an evil demon, in the red glow of the fire, than that of a man.

The Arab sat across the fire from him. And although he appeared to be unconcerned, there was in his face a curious, watchful reasoning. Then he spat into the fire.

Dale started and hurriedly, with a furtive glance at the Arab, restored the bundle to its hiding-place.

"You'll get your share when we reach Aleppo," muttered Dale between his teeth, and continued smoking his cigarette.

The fire dwindled and sank to smoldering embers. Suddenly Dale glanced across at the Arab.

"Better make up the fire," he said. "It will be safer against snakes and such like. I'll take a little rest; wake me later, and you can have your sleep."

With that Arnold Dale lay down, and the Arab went off at once to gather thorn-bushes for the fire. After a while he returned, but hesitated about putting them on, glancing over at the sleeping man. His snoring strangely kept time with the crunching sound of the still feeding camels.

The Arab kicked the fire. The sudden glow that was aroused illumined the sleeping man's face. Yusuf El Essad watched him a moment in meditation, then his lip curled with a snarl as he muttered something under his breath in Arabic and spat into the fire.

He had changed his mind about replenishing the fire. He gave one swift glance at the sleeping man—then wandered away again among the dunes. Once he hesitated and looked back, as though he had heard a sound, then went on searching about on the sand, evidently with a definite purpose.

The moon had risen and sent a clear,

penetrating light over the endless waste. There was now an eager, satisfied expression on the Arab's face, as though he had come to some decision. Every now and then he bent to a large stone, lifted it carefully, and peered behind, then passed to another and another. He had taken off his *kufeyah*.

At last he moved an extra large stone. By the sudden, alert look on his face it was evident that he had found something as his hand with the *kufeyah* in it darted down behind the stone.

After careful maneuvering, with the assistance of a large clasp-knife, he secured the thing, which struggled and fought in the folds of the *kufeyah*.

He carried his treasure gingerly back to the little camp. There was a smile on his face and a glint of a subtle cunning in his eyes as he crept up stealthily with a catlike movement to the sleeping man.

He paused in his actions a moment as he peered down at him. Then he held the *kufeyah* over the fire for a minute. The thing within struggled and fought as it felt the heat. Then the Arab turned to the sleeping man and shook out the *kufeyah* over his legs.

A large, black scorpion dropped on the sleeper's right leg and brought down its tail, sending its powerful and deadly sting deep into the flesh.

Arnold Dale awoke with a start.

The Arab was seated beside the fire, peering into its dull, red heart. Dale raised himself suddenly as his hand went with a quick jerk to the place where the scorpion had stung him.

Then he gave a yell of horror as he perceived the creature hastening away into the desert. A look of abject terror came into his face. He well knew that his fate was sealed—no man had ever been known to recover from the sting of the black scorpion of El Moharrek.

His face began to twitch with nervous, spasmodic jerks. His eyes fastened upon the Arab.

"I told you to keep the fire going," he yelled, "or that would never have happened."

But the Arab remained silent and con-

tinued to sit crouched by the fire, peering into its slowly dying embers.

Dale's face had taken on a gray, waxen hue, made the more ghastly by the moonbeams. He glared at the Arab like a wild beast. Then, as though a sudden realization had come to him, he yelled again at the man. His frame shook with rage as with a terrible fever.

But the Arab still was silent, though he was now watching the other with eyes unflinching and alert like the eyes of a snake about to strike.

He had forgotten one thing—to take away Dale's revolver.

At last the latter appeared to comprehend the eternal silence, and the meaning of those watchful, waiting eyes, as he whipped out his revolver and fired. The Arab's hand went to his shoulder with a swift jerk as a spasm of pain passed over his face.

Dale savagely cursed him. He cursed the desert and its crawling, venomous life.

"I don't know whether I hurt you much, you lousy dog, you scum of the street," he muttered between his teeth as his breath came in short, quick gasps; "but you shall die in this hell with me!"

With that he turned heavily and was about to empty his revolver into the bodies of the feeding camels, when the Arab called to him to wait, and his voice trailed on in low, husky tones.

Dale paused and glanced back at the man in surprise.

"It is useless to shoot the poor beasts," went on the Arab. "You may still need one of them."

A sickly smile passed over Dale's face, but he became intent in listening as the Arab continued:

"I knew you would steal in the end—it was either the money or the daughter, and that only meant the first through the second. So I thought to help you, for I guessed you had some scheme to catch me and make yourself a hero in their sight; that is why I have never taken my eyes off you on this trip; and I was sure of the scheme when you ran as she came down the stairs in the night and saw me the thief.

"I could not have her, though I also

was tempted to steal her once, but the man Sumner and the American College had taught me many things. I was sure she was too good for you. But we did not take the money, as you will see if you open the *kufeyah*."

The Arab paused as his dark, searching eyes followed Dale's movements. The latter feverishly withdrew the bundle from his bosom and opened it out. It contained, instead of bank-notes, a pile of old letters. With a look of utter disgust he threw the lot into the fire.

"No, we did not really steal," went on the Arab again, as Dale watched him, fascinated. "I left a note to explain all, and that you were very weak. So you may go back, if you wish—if you are not afraid; but I think it better—" He paused again as his eyes wandered over the desert.

"Go back?" breathed Arnold Dale, mystified. Was the Arab mad, he wondered, raving from the wound he had received? His face certainly looked ghastly and his eyes were glassy.

Again the Arab's voice trailed on, as his eyes fixed upon Dale with a penetrating, searching look.

"If you had another chance, would you do better?" questioned the Arab. "Would you work and try to make good?" His voice was full of a marked earnestness.

"Yes—but—" came the husky reply, and there was a ring of hope in the tone.

There followed a long pause in which the Arab's eyes continued their piercing study of Dale's face. Then slowly a faint smile of satisfaction flickered on the Arab's lips as though he had found in the other's expression something for which he had been searching, searching eagerly, and he said in clear and ringing tones:

"Then you have that chance, for I took the poison from the scorpion's tail with my clasp-knife!"

Dale gazed at the Arab, amazed and speechless, but a light sprang into his face as a vision penetrated his befogged brain.

But before he realized what was happening, the Arab, still holding his wounded shoulder, had mounted a camel and without a word or look swung away south into the desolate and moonlit regions of Arabia.

Not Under Control



by
Maxwell Smith

COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE.

CHAPTER I.

THE JINX.

MASTER of steam and sail, unlimited tonnage, on any ocean and the Great Lakes—and nobody would give him a ship! In days, too, when they were crying for skippers!

From the top of the giant coal trestle, Noel Pembroke looked out over Buffalo harbor awakening from its winter sleep. He had climbed up there to view the scene of which he had tried to become a part, and been turned down. So, before returning to the lakes, had he been turned down on the deep water.

The inactivity was gall to him. A master on the lakes when he was twenty-five, licensed to command a vessel in any corner of the world when he was twenty-eight—at thirty-three virtually blacklisted. They wouldn't even give him one of the relics that had been dragged from the scrap-heap and patched into some sort of seaworthiness to help beat the U-boats!

The nature of Captain Noel Pembroke was not inclined to bitterness, yet his face was wry as he thought of the pass he had been brought to. They said he was jinxed. Maybe he was. A record of four ships lost in ten months was his, when bottoms were more precious than gold. There was no place for a jinxed skipper.

With the cold breeze that flogged the

drift ice down Lake Erie into the Niagara River whipping in his face, he braced himself on the topmost height of the trestle and swore aloud.

He did not consider himself abused. There was no resentment against the owners who had refused to sign him, regardless of his capability as a seaman. He did not blame them; only, they were narrow in their way of looking at things. He did not feel, however, that the gods had been unkind to him. They had piled disaster so heavily at his door.

Pembroke grew sick when he looked down on the ships strung out along the Buffalo River, busy with preparations for the first trip of the season. Inside the breakwall were a dozen others that had wintered there, all with a trickle of smoke from their stacks bespeaking the end of their long rest. Away out beyond where Point Abino protruded from the Canadian side was the smudge of a vessel, probably the first out, bucking through the crumbling ice-fields to the lure of the extra trip at high rates.

A tug was snaking a big carrier from a dead island berth, where she had laid through the frozen months with grain in storage, to an elevator for unloading. Right under his feet, coal was roaring into the holds of another 400-footer.

Noel Pembroke swore again. Master of steam and sail, license unlimited, and he

could be no more than a spectator. He shook his fist at nothing in particular, condemned two U-boats, one mine, and one mate who had let a quartermaster sail degrees off in a haze, and pile his last ship on that graveyard, Sable Island. Then, finding that the spectacle, from his point of vantage, was but driving the iron deeper, he clambered down from the trestle and wandered along the docks.

Though it was six years since he had left the lakes to sail the ocean, he saw here and there a face he knew. An old skipper hailed him. It was a man who had sailed for his father when Pembroke, Sr., had had his line of lake vessels, and he stopped.

The old man gripped Pembroke's hand and murmured a word of sympathy. Like most every one else, he had heard of the run of misfortune and how it had led to Pembroke being posted as hoodooed. Gossip like that travels far.

Pembroke smiled as though he hadn't a care. There was nothing of the angry dejection that had been in his manner when he had been alone. He was not built to parade his feelings. Circumstances might have conspired to give him a raw deal, but that was something to be railed at in his secret heart. If he did choose to give way to rancor, that could be done just as well when he was by himself.

His ruddy face, which told no more than the age he owned, was unclouded as he returned the hand-shake and the greeting. He was honestly glad to see the old man with whom had sailed as a boy.

"It could be a lot worse," he nodded. "They might have suspended my ticket for that Sable Island mess. They didn't, so I still can sail the seas."

His father's old friend knew the spirit of the man and did not become too sympathetic. But he could not down the whimsical note of regret that came into his voice.

"I know, lad; I know that. Admiralty finding isn't out yet, is it?"

"No." Pembroke frowned. "They'll get around to that in a year or so, I suppose. Meanwhile"—he smiled again—"I've enough to live on."

"But y're not content to live idle," came the quick reply. "Y're makin' out to be

chipper enough, Noel, but—I got a slant at you atop that trestle. And," the old man was abashed as he made the confession, "I used the glasses on you."

Captain Pembroke laughed the first spontaneous laughter he had known for weeks.

"If I looked like I felt I must have been a wobegone critter—wobegone and just plain mad. For, captain, this—this outcast loneliness is creeping under my hide till it hurts. Why the devil, can you tell me, should it have fallen to my lot to meet that submarine pirate in mid-Atlantic, where no one ever had met him before? Right after a mine had knocked out my previous ship? And another infernal U-boat had bagged the one before that within five miles of Liverpool? And then, by Jones, to round it off, that square-headed farmer had to lose the course and hang up my next ship for a total loss!

"I'm not kicking, old friend, but isn't it more than is coming to any man that he should lose four ships on four trips? Good Lord, if I was a ball-player I could be proud of a hundred per cent record, but as a shipmaster—"

He broke off, and, despite the tragedy of his own position, coupled with the loss of a total of thirty-two thousand tons of shipping that had gone down under him in ten months, he could not help laughing. The series of disasters was too absurd.

The old skipper's eyes shone, and he patted Pembroke on the shoulder, as he had done when Noel was a youth learning his calling.

"Don't you care, Noel," he said seriously. "A man that can laugh like that after what you've been up against isn't done. They'll forget it after a while. With all the ships they're turnin' out, they've got to have skippers."

"That's what I've been telling myself," Pembroke sighed, "but their memories are holding out pretty well. This is April, and I've been hunting a berth since November. When I couldn't land down there"—he waved eastward to the Atlantic—"I came back to the lakes. I've been to every owner, from Buffalo to Duluth in the last two months. They are very sorry, but every-

thing is assigned. The Pacific Coast is my next stop. After that I'll try South America. When my money runs out I'll get a job on a barge or a canal boat."

He had not wholly succeeded in stifling the bitter taste this time. The old man noticed it, and spoke kindly encouragement. Pembroke squared his erect body. His eyes snapped.

"I'll make out all right," he asserted. "Yes, if I have to steal a ship—or buy one, by Jones, with my last half-dollar."

The old sailor was reassured. "That's the boy!" he applauded.

He did not mention how he wished he could give Noel Pembroke a place on his own ship. That was impossible, and he knew that Pembroke understood. He was sailing now for a line that was controlled by the man who had crushed Pembroke's father.

"Going up a way?" he asked. "I've to be at the office in ten minutes."

"I'll go as far as the association," said Pembroke, and fell into step.

A few blocks up Main Street he left the old man and crossed to the vessel-owners' association rooms. He would make one more try.

At the foot of the stairs he met another acquaintance.

"Say, Pembroke, the Manowac wants a mate. I don't know whether you'd take it, but—"

Pembroke turned eagerly.

"Sure of that?"

"Just left her skipper. Name's Boyan. He's up-stairs now."

Pembroke's foot already was on the first step. Take it? Would he balk at sailing as mate? He'd sail as anything to break the jinx, to prove there was not a curse on him.

"Thanks, old man, I'll grab him."

"Wait a minute," the other stopped him. "Do you know Boyan?"

"That isn't the point," responded Pembroke grimly. "It is whether *he* knows me. I'm hoping he's deaf and never heard of Noel Pembroke."

His informant laughed. "I was going to tell you he's a hard nut—and, as usual, he's half soused."

"He won't be the first of the breed I've sailed under," responded Pembroke, and took the stairs two at a time.

Before he reached the big room on the second floor, the thought came to him that he hadn't the least idea what the Manowac was. She was new since he had been on the lakes. She might be a tug or a scow, for all he knew—or cared. What he wanted was a berth. This man Boyan might be the one in a thousand to whom the story of Noel Pembroke had not penetrated. If he only could get his foot on the ladder again!

CHAPTER II.

THE ULTIMATUM.

PEMBROKE'S jaw was set and his face slightly flushed as he paused in the doorway to pick out Captain Boyan. The flush was there in anticipation of another turn-down. It had been growing deeper with every rebuff.

Till now, he admitted, much of the color that mounted when he received another "No!" even though that were accompanied by softening speech, sprang from the fount of anger. Latterly he had found it more difficult to accept the refusals with patience.

A tall, broad man, with an altogether inadequate straggling of mustache, took his eye. He fitted the brief description of Boyan that Pembroke had been given. He looked hard, and he was at least two sheets in the wind. He was laughing boisterously as he crossed to the door. Pembroke advanced, and they met midway.

The whole make-up of Captain Frank Boyan did not impress Pembroke favorably. There was an indirectness in Boyan's gaze, a hunching upward and forward of the left shoulder, a loping swing to the right arm, that all combined to make the picture disagreeable if nothing else.

But this was not a moment for likes and dislikes. Boyan wanted a mate. Pembroke wanted that place as first officer. His attitude perforce had to be, figuratively, that of the beggar.

He halted in front of the master of the Manowac.

"Captain Boyan?"

"Yep!" Boyan divined his mission: "What ticket?"

Pembroke was as curt: "Master."

"So?" Boyan's glance ranged over the trim, upstanding figure with satisfaction. He knew a sailorman and a worker when he saw one.

To Pembroke the appraisal told that the ordeal which ate into his pride was coming. He gritted his teeth.

"What you been sailin'?"

"Back off the Atlantic after six years."

Captain Boyan gnawed the uneven blond mustache. His teeth showed.

"Why? What's y'r last ship?"

Noel Pembroke wished he had called it quits before he approached Boyan. The man's arrogance was not conducive to pleasantness under the most auspicious conditions. In Pembroke's irritated state it was more than unfortunate.

"Kingfisher. Ashore Sable Island last November," he replied shortly.

That conveyed nothing to Boyan except, of course, that this applicant had lost his vessel. He did not remember the Kingfisher. His brows wrinkled.

"What's y'r name?"

It cracked like a whip: "Pembroke!" and the speaker came to his full five feet eleven, his eyes fixed on Boyan, his chin tight.

Light dawned on Captain Boyan. His lip drew over his teeth again. He laughed, and looked around the room to see who was observing.

A quiet had fallen. From their meeting the two men had exuded an air of conflict, somehow, that had compelled attention. Without taking his glance off Boyan's face, Pembroke sensed the expectant atmosphere, and remembered that he had been advised that Boyan was a "hard nut."

On his part, now that he knew who Pembroke was, Boyan wanted everybody to enjoy his handling of the jonahed young skipper. One or two of the spectators recollected Noel hazily from years back as able to look after himself. Most of the dozen or so in the room, however, knew no more than his looks could tell them of his real quantity. They all knew Boyan.

Sure that he had an audience, the Manowac's captain squinted at Pembroke and grinned.

"So you want to sign on the Manowac, son?" The diminutive held a wealth of insult. Noel burned. "D'y'know her?"

Pembroke kept his temper. "No."

"An' y' don't know who owns her?"

The heat ran from Pembroke's features. He stuck his hands into the pockets of his coat. He saw what he had let himself in for. Why in the name of Heaven hadn't he asked beforehand who did own the Manowac? He went through with it.

"What's that got to do with it?"

"Nothin'—oh, nothin'." Captain Boyan slapped his sides as he guffawed. "Why, you darned fool, she's a Grant boat—a Grant boat—d'you get me?"

Pembroke smothered an ejaculation of annoyance. In effect, he had been asking a job from the man who had driven his father into bankruptcy. From the man who had forced down the last flag of the Pembroke line on the Great Lakes. That had been nine years ago. It had ended a bitter freight war in which the Pembroke ships alone had been arrayed against the combination directed by Ninian Grant.

Although Grant had won, the stubborn fight had cost him many hundreds of thousands of dollars. The finish, the defeat, had cost Noel Pembroke's father his life as well as his fortune; he had survived less than twelve months. Then for two more years Noel had remained on the lakes, while he had chafed to sail the broader wastes of the ocean, simply to defy Grant by his presence.

Finally, having won his master's ticket and sailed as master, in spite of obstacles placed by Grant, he had succumbed to the call of the salt water.

And here he was back—back, like a fool, as Boyan had called him, asking a berth on a Grant boat.

It required an effort for Pembroke to keep his hands off Boyan. He knew that compassionate glances were upon him. He didn't thank the watchers any for that. Before everything at that instant, he wanted to slam Boyan clear in the middle of his face—right on the nose.

Boyan was bigger by probably forty pounds, but he had useless beef, and didn't look like he could stay. His face was not that of a fighter, but rather of one who would hit before his opponent was prepared, and count on his weight to clinch the battle if his truculence following a smashing blow could not do it.

So much Pembroke decided in that minute of cold contemplation. But he concluded to avoid trouble. He turned away.

"Good day, Captain Boyan."

The studied civility of the remark should have been warning. Instead, it switched Boyan from merriment to the other extreme. His meanness took the ascendency. He caught Pembroke by the shoulder.

"What's y'r hurry? I ain't through talkin'."

Wheeling rapidly, Pembroke brushed the restraining hand aside.

"You're through both talking and acting as far as I'm concerned. Shut up and keep your hands snug."

If Boyan hadn't had those last two drinks he would have gaged Pembroke better. He sneered.

"Yah!" He spat past Pembroke. "When they won't let y' sink any more boats on the ocean y've gotta come up here to help out! How much 're y' gettin'?"

The innuendo was not lost on Pembroke. He stepped close.

"Just what are you trying to say?"

The bystanders edged nearer. The storm they had seen impending was about to burst. Knowing Boyan, they desired to prevent it if possible. He was not always a gentlemanly fighter—and beside him Pembroke looked slight.

In his heart Boyan doubted the wisdom of that last gibe. He planted his feet firmly, and wondered whether he ought to follow it up with his huge fist before Pembroke got started. Pembroke still had his hands in his pockets. The opening was good.

"Just what do you mean?"

The repeated question, quiet, incisive, refused to be ignored.

Boyan ran against form. He failed to strike—largely because his antagonist's steady scrutiny left him uncertain. At the

same time he comprehended that he had gone too far to quit. He attempted to get away with it. His face stuck into Pembroke's.

"Ain't you been out sinkin' every boat y' could get y'r hands on? Helpin' the Hun—"

Every one in the room heard Pembroke's whistling breath. Two other masters who had no great love for Boyan made to intervene. Pembroke pushed them aside.

"Get set, you hog!" he exclaimed softly. "I'm going to lick you."

If he had to, Boyan could fight. Without more ado he swung at Pembroke. Before his hand left his shoulder Noel's right took him fair on the mouth. Then they became a swirling tangle of thrashing arms and legs on the floor, with Boyan, cursing, underneath.

There was nothing elegant about it. Pembroke squatted, unashamed, on his man, and pasted him. Boyan would have done as much for him, and he knew it.

They pulled Pembroke off and held him. Laughing, he nursed his knuckles.

"All right, men," he said buoyantly, "I'll let him up to have the joy of knocking him down."

They expostulated.

"I'm sorry if I've mussed the place," added Pembroke. "But you heard what he said. Come on, Boyan!"

The Manowac's master was rising slowly. There was blood on his lips. His tongue found a gap in the front where three good teeth had been. His left eye was numb and puffy. But he wasn't out of the battle. He was going after Pembroke when a voice halted him.

"Boyan!"

The sharp word came from a man on the threshold. Suspended in action, Boyan turned his head and waited.

Pembroke looked curiously at the newcomer. There was something familiar about him. He identified a mannerism—a quick, decisive uplifting of the hand. That had belonged to old Ninian Grant. This, then, was his son, who had taken active management of the Grant fleet.

The ship-owner's gaze shifted from his captain to Pembroke. It took on a gleam

of recognition and narrowed. He spoke sidewise at Boyan.

"When you take out the Manowac, Frank, I'd like you to have some of your eyesight. What's the trouble?"

"Jumped me when I wouldn't sign him as mate."

Ninian Grant, Jr., smiled.

"And who is he?"

"You know who I am, Grant," cut in Pembroke. "My name is Pembroke—*Pembroke!* We'll let it end here, except that I want to say your friend Boyan is a liar. And that naturally I didn't know who owned the Manowac when—"

Grant was amused.

"What difference would that have made?"

"None, except that I've sense enough to know where I stand a Chinaman's chance of getting a job."

"Some sense," amended Grant suavely, "but not *enough* sense. For instance, you've come back to the lakes. If you really had been sensible, you know, you'd never have done that." He shrugged. "*You* can't ever sail on the lakes."

"I can't!" Pembroke's face hardened. "Who says so?"

"I do! And"—Grant's teeth met—"what I say mostly goes. Why, *you* can't even swim in the lakes if I say you sha'n't!"

That declaration changed Pembroke's plans. He had been going to try his luck on the Coast. Not now! If they offered him the biggest ship in the world to-morrow he wouldn't take it. No, by Jones, *no!*

"We'll see," he stated crisply. "But let me tell you this: if I want to sail the lakes I'm going to do it! Watch!" He spun on his heel to Boyan. "And any time *you* want some more, come around near me making remarks about helping the Hun!"

CHAPTER III.

THE GIRL IN THE MOTOR-BOAT.

WITHIN six weeks Noel Pembroke made good on his defi to Ninian Grant. While big lake ships were being cut in half so that in this manner they

could pass through the Welland Canal and, patched together below the locks, go to augment the ever-increasing demand for ocean tonnage, he took a ship up the canal.

And when he steamed out of Lake Ontario and into Lake Erie, he trod his own bridge. For the old house flag of the Pembroke Line was flying, and the Windspray was registered under the name of Captain Noel Pembroke.

Grant's declaration that the lakes were closed to him was responsible for that. It had aroused in Pembroke an unalterable determination to prove Grant was wrong. Coming from the stock he did, Noel could see no other course.

When he had started energetically to execute his purpose after that antagonistic interview, the young captain understood that he could do little more than hoist his flag. His luck, however, had held surprisingly good.

While any and every sort of bottoms were being snatched up at outrageous prices, he heard of the Windspray, 940 tons gross, a steel vessel that had been laid away in a yard at Three Rivers, Quebec. Clyde-built in 1890 for the St. Lawrence trade, she had been wrecked in 1899 in the Gulf, raised, and rebuilt in 1900. Three years later she had been crushed in the ice, and again had required extensive repairs.

From then she had continued without mishap in service until 1913, when she had been retired to make room for a new vessel, and nobody would buy her.

But the soaring value of tonnage brought about by the war at last had brought the Windspray from the junk-pile. The winter of 1917-1918 had seen her overhauled once more while the ice bound the yard at Three Rivers. Her owner figured that she could readily be sold into the coastwise trade for a fancy sum.

Thus it came about that he was right so far as the fancy price was concerned, but the Windspray went to the lakes, instead of the edges of the ocean, because Noel Pembroke was constrained to take up in a puny way the battle in which his father had fallen.

It had taken hard scratching for him to raise the price. The old craft was marked

as a bargain at \$130 a ton—four times what she was worth. As a starter he had had the few thousand dollars his father had left; he never had had occasion to touch that. During the three years he had crossed the Atlantic as master at wartime wages, with a fifty per cent bonus for navigating the submarine zone, he had put away considerable money.

When the series of disasters had shelved him he had been making \$600 a month plus. Together, these two items had made up a respectable \$30,000. With that he had taken his option.

On the strength of the rich freights waiting for anything that would float, he had no great difficulty in procuring an equal amount from a retired shipowner who had been close to his father.

Fifty thousand dollars cash and notes for the balance of roughly \$75,000 had taken the Windspray. At prevailing rates, he reckoned on wiping out easily half that obligation by the close of the lake season. Before the ice set in in December he would go down the St. Lawrence and obtain further fat pickings on the coast.

All in all, as he coned his restored packet out from Port Colborne into Lake Erie and squared away for Buffalo, Noel Pembroke experienced a joyous tingling. He was not only fighting Grant. He was out to show that the hoodoo was a fake.

Everything was going his way. Already he had the promise of a cargo for Detroit, clean package freight, and another for the return trip. If only—he leaned over the engine-room grating and smiled the while he listened anxiously—if only that thumping mass of stuff down there would hang together and hold to the bedplates. He thought it would—weren't they good Scotch engines, and only twenty-eight years old?

He rang for full speed ahead. The Windspray picked up to a magnificent nine knots. By Jones, he'd go into Buffalo flying, and make Grant take notice!

The lake was like glass under the late May sun. Three hours after clearing the canal, Pembroke passed triumphantly inside the breakwall at Buffalo. There he encountered the first snag.

Through a broker he had engaged dock space. To cut down expense, he dispensed with a tug and took his ship up the narrow harbor entrance. His was a river berth about four hundred yards distant. He arrived to find it occupied by a Grant ore-carrier.

Pembroke held his vessel in the stream and exchanged pointed words with the dock superintendent. The discussion brought him word that no dockage had been reserved for him. There wasn't any available. There wasn't likely to be.

The hand of Grant was large in the circumstance.

Meanwhile the Windspray was blocking the channel. A ship up-stream was clamoring for room to pass.

Pembroke backed up, canted into one of the slips, and steamed out, to anchor inside the wall. Then he went ashore to converse with his broker.

The second blow struck harder, although the broker did his best to soften it. He paved the way by assuring Pembroke that he really had arranged for wharf room, but the terminal company's clerk had neglected to record it. Consequently, since the engagement never had been officially made, from the technical standpoint, the broker feared there was no recourse.

The broker became more apologetic as he proceeded to administer the next and greater shock. He hated to do it, but he had his orders.

"I'm afraid that isn't all, captain."

Pembroke was popping mad. "What else?"

"The—ah—cargo I promised you hasn't come through. The manufacturers have canceled their shipping engagements. They say their orders have been canceled—account of the war, you know—"

The sundry articles on the broker's desk danced as Pembroke's fist came down. The story was so flimsy it was ludicrous. Of course, he perceived why the cargo was not at hand. He said so.

A feeble denial answered him, but the man was talking to emptiness. The door slammed as Pembroke stormed out.

In the open air he calmed down. He had lost the opening trick—that was evi-

dent. That did not mean that he must continue losing. Grant could not now employ the tactics he had used against Pembroke's father. He could not slash rates for the satisfaction of putting a trifle like the Windspray out of business. His only weapon was that which he had just now used — his influence to prevent Pembroke obtaining cargo.

It remained to be seen whether his influence was strong enough under the abnormal conditions that existed.

Pembroke proceeded to drum up his own freight. He could not afford to have his vessel lie idle. Again his luck stood up. The following day he got a cargo of roofing for delivery at Toledo, and destined for a new army cantonment in Ohio. It had come from across New York State by canal, and was delivered overside to the Windspray within twenty-four hours. He was cleared and nosing out into the lake on the evening of the third day after his arrival.

A head wind interfered with him, but while it checked the Windspray far below her best nine knots, it gave her opportunity to show that she could behave in a sea. The second daybreak she raised Point Pelee, which ends the practically straightaway run of 180 miles from Buffalo. The long promontory was still fifteen miles distant when, in the early light, Pembroke made out a vessel overhauling him. It was the Manowac.

The wind had died during the night, but had left a heavy swell. Watching the big four thousand three hundred ton carrier in action for the first time, Pembroke noticed how badly she wallowed. That undoubtedly was why she had not been taken with her sisters for the ocean traffic. To his trained eye it was very apparent that she was cranky. Several times as she drew nearer he saw her skid and bury her nose, while the Windspray, of so much less tonnage, rode easily.

Passing the point the vessels were almost abreast, and about three cable-lengths apart. The Windspray was inshore.

Boyan was on the bridge, and Pembroke made out the figure beside him to be Ninian Grant, Jr.

As the Manowac took the lead, Boyan

yanked his siren cord. The derisive braying caused Pembroke to reach for his engine-room telegraph. As he did so he caught sight of a girl in a motor-boat coming out beyond Point Pelee. She was standing in the speedy little craft, handling it with skill. She waved, and Pembroke, instead of ringing for speed, as he realized it would have been childish to do, since the Manowac had four knots on him, brought the Windspray down to half.

"Swing over to meet that girl," he ordered the wheelsman.

She was still a couple of miles away. The Windspray veered toward her. Pembroke supposed that she was seeking help. It was a lonely enough shore along there. Something might have happened, and she had seen the smoke of the approaching vessels.

Thompson, his mate, voiced the same idea. Also he remarked that the Manowac was slowing down and signaling.

Heading straight for the Windspray, the girl was within a mile.

"By Jones!" Pembroke handed his glasses to the mate. "Take a look!"

"Whew!" the mate whistled. "Some little beauty to be running wild on the lake like that."

Pembroke took back the glasses.

"Little!" he snorted, focusing again on the girl. "She's as big as you are; but, thank Heaven, Jim, she's not so rudely fashioned. Look at that hair streaming out! Look how she came through that choppy spot! Jangle that telegraph for slow."

Leaning out by the starboard dodger he watched the girl come near. But she made no move to cut down her speed, far less to stop.

Reaching in close beside the Windspray, she smiled up at Pembroke—then circled astern and steered for the Manowac. He followed her with puzzled eyes.

"What's she up to?" he wondered aloud.

"Maybe she doesn't like the looks of our packet with its patches," suggested Thompson. "She's falling for that crazy boat over there."

She was indeed more interested in the Manowac. The carrier was crawling along

with scarcely steerage way when a line was thrown to the motor-boat. The girl quickly made fast and fended off the big ship's side in workmanlike manner.

A Jacob's ladder was dropped and a deckhand descended to her boat. With a strong, overhand grip the girl mounted to the deck, while the man took her boat out of danger of the rolling Manowac.

Captain Pembroke saw Grant help her tenderly over the side, and he grunted. She turned and pointed to the Windspray, apparently putting a question. Grant shook his head and laughed, gesturing contemptuously.

Pembroke grunted again. He strode across his bridge and called for speed. The Manowac would catch him again, of course, but meantime he wanted to get away. For some unaccountable reason it angered him to see Grant and that girl standing there together.

CHAPTER IV.

A REVELATION.

WITH Ninian Grant's slighting comment on the Windspray in her ears, Aletta Vanton found a new curiosity in the smaller ship. She knew almost every vessel that passed up and down the lakes, and here was a stranger. That in itself was enough to occasion interest.

The Manowac was holding at dead slow while her motor-boat trailed alongside. Pembroke, therefore, making all his speed, was drawing rapidly away.

As they walked forward Grant addressed the girl several times, but she did not answer. Finally she turned on him her clear, gray eyes—eyes that now contained that baffling, drifting hint of mingled violet and opal. She was frankly inquisitive.

"I seem to remember that house flag, Ninian. Whose ship is that?"

Grant motioned disdainfully.

"A whippersnapper," he replied. "A whippersnapper who thinks he is annoying me."

He smiled at her and changed the subject to one more intimate. He had no time to waste talking of Pembroke. He wanted

only to bring this impulsive creature of the lake to a promise to marry him.

For two years he had been bent on that, but always she had eluded him. Some day, of course, she would give in. So Grant believed. All his life he had been accustomed to people giving in—voluntarily or after they had been beaten down.

There had been times when he had tentatively attempted to bring her to surrender by mild coercion, but he never had dared go far. The danger signals had gone up at the outset, and, fearful that he might lose all chance of her, Grant had ceased the pressure. She was too untamed for measures of that sort. Her life had been too close to the tempest, to the free-running waters of the lake, and the wild things that scurried in the brush that stretched up from the shore and around her home.

When she was in her late teens they had managed to get her to a boarding-school in Cleveland. But they never had known what day she would show up at Point Pelee. When she felt like going home she never had stood on ceremony about her departure from school. Frequently she had made the trip across the lake from Cleveland in a motor-boat. Sixty miles or so in a cockleshell held no terrors for her.

Once she had done it alone in a twenty-foot catboat, when, on orders from her uncle and guardian, she had been refused a power craft. It was that which had charmed and hypnotized Ninian Grant—her untrammelled freedom and resourcefulness, and the glory of her lithe, strong, young body.

Now she led him up on the snubby fore-castle, still gazing after the Windspray. She was not disposed to change the subject as he proposed. She elected to ignore the trend he was giving the conversation—the reiterated query as to when she would become Mrs. Grant.

"Why do you speak of him like that?" She was characteristically direct. "Who is he?"

"My dear Aletta," Grant sat on the capstan, admiring eyes on her, "he is simply a man who unfortunately does not know enough to stay from where there isn't room for him."

She pushed a tangle of the rich dark hair from her forehead. The soft lips pursed and her glance was quizzical.

"No room for his ship—or for him personally?"

"For neither," said Grant, and wished he had not been so outspoken. Confound Pembroke!

"Why not?" The challenge came without hesitation. "With the need that exists for ships I should imagine every one would be welcome—that rivalry would be forgotten in the business of helping win the war."

He sought to pass it off lightly.

"But, dear girl"—she never objected to his endearments, but she never responded—"you do not understand. It is a business proposition—to a certain extent." With a smile he reverted to the matter nearest his heart: "You would not have me a pauper when you get around to marrying me?"

Aletta scoffed: "Is that dinky ship going to pauperize you?"

"I hope not," he laughed, and she noted the sneer he cast after the *Windspray*. "But why give it even a chance? Later on it will be mine when that fool has had enough. Why prolong his agony—though he deserves it?"

Again he felt that he had expressed himself too freely. The rounded lines of her face had lost some of their wonted gentleness. She seemed some way to have drawn away from him. Her voice was cold.

"Don't you think, Ninian, that sometimes it pays to live and let live? That ship could not possibly do you any harm financially." The low words sounded more as though she were thinking aloud: "It might, however, through your *own* actions, lead to your—disadvantage otherwise."

Alarm showed in his face. It had been stupid to talk to her like that. Anxiously he stepped beside her. He knew that she was given to impulse; that she was quick to judge—or to reverse a judgment. That last was what startled him. It was conceivable that she would turn violently against him.

Up till now he had stood well in her estimation. So well that she never had returned a point-blank "No!" when he urged

his eternal question; she merely had laughed him away. And what had given him great hope was that she never had contradicted those who took it that she and Grant were tacitly engaged. More than that, when, as he now was doing, he went up or down on one of his vessels, she always ran out like this to visit him if it were anywhere between sunrise and sunset.

Grant confessed to himself that Aletta Vanton was the one thing in the world of which he stood in awe. His wealth never had failed of its dominance in other directions.

He did not fail then to understand her implication—her threat, for that was what it amounted to. He hastened to meet it, but first he endeavored to justify his position.

"You see, Aletta, this man was impudent."

Under the warning in her eyes he stopped. In the glimpses she had had of Pembroke as she had rounded his ship, he had not appeared to the girl as Grant would make him out. Hers was an impression gained, it was true, from a fleeting sight, with no real knowledge to support it, but she was fond of retaining snap impressions until they were proved to the contrary.

She intimated something of that nature, her look going again to the *Windspray*, on which Pembroke was burning coal lavishly in fretful effort to get away where he could not see the girl at Grant's side. Also she demanded details.

"In what was he—impudent?"

Grant could not explain very well. His thoughts always wandered when her eyes were full on him like that. She made it difficult to lie; and dangerous, for she had a way of later prying out the truth. He could not tell her, however, that he had provoked Pembroke's declaration of defiance by arbitrarily announcing that he *could not* sail the Great Lakes. He fell on a half-truth.

"Well—it's an old story, going back a number of years," he started, then switched off: "For Heaven's sake, girl, let's forget about him. We'll have little enough time to talk about ourselves before you go back to your boat."

Aletta Vanton's bright smile, which flashed most brilliantly when she was most inscrutable, broke on him.

"Perhaps I'll go on to Detroit," she said airily.

Glad as he was to get away from the subject of Pembroke, and delightful as the prospect of her company was, Grant protested.

"You can't do that! Not in that dress, Aletta!"

She regarded her short, coarse, linen skirt and blouse with its flowing collar drawn loosely together with a bit of bright ribbon, and her high, rough boots.

"Why, not?"

"Because— Good Lord!" he laughed, "you're not a child any longer, my dear. You can't run around town like a little savage, as you could a couple of years ago."

Her laughter resounded over the ship. It was not due so much to what he had said as to the fact that Grant had in the slightest measure tried to tell her what she could or could not do.

"We'll be in by three this afternoon, won't we?" she remarked, paying no heed to his protest.

Recognizing the uselessness of argument, he nodded. When she became Mrs. Grant he would have a job on his hands all right! She would have to drop some of this suddenness—this disregard for the customs of civilized folk.

"I'll take a cab to Uncle Ben's, and nobody will see me," she added. "Not that it matters if the whole town turns out! I have some clothes there, anyway."

He was aware of that. The aunt with whom she lived kept the emergency garb there because she never had any idea when Aletta would cut across the corner of the lake in her boat and up the river to visit in Detroit.

Nevertheless he could not resist another objection—he believed it was more or less a duty. Besides, if he could turn her back it would be a step toward taming her.

"Your aunt here—what will she say?"

She eyed him mischievously.

"What will she think, you mean! When she sees my boat hoisted aboard she'll probably conclude that I'm eloping. Which—"

He inclined toward her, his face hungry, his arms involuntarily reaching. But the same impenetrable armor, that almost imperceptible change of countenance and raising of the hand, kept him at a distance.

She finished the interrupted thought before he could speak:

"Which I am *not*!"

Seizing upon the opening she had given, Grant played upon it with all his power of persuasion, begging her to go through with the suggestion. She only laughed, reminding him that he had characterized her as a savage—in which costume, she could not possibly be married—and further, that her boat had to be brought on board.

He gave that order and another to the cook to produce his most enticing breakfast. Then he settled down for an impassioned seven hours' argument; for she would be wholly his, with none to interfere with their tête-à-tête for even an instant, until they reached Detroit. She let him go on with his protestations and pleading. But she did not surrender. Time after time she let him attain the breathless pinnacle whereon victory seemed sure—only to be rendered more abjectly suppliant at her continued evasiveness.

Only once did she refer to the Wind-spray. That was when the Manowac again passed Pembroke, who was off to port this time, steering his course for Toledo. Casually she inquired who owned this latest acquisition to the lake fleet.

"Pembroke," said Grant, and resumed his love-making.

She did not say that the single name had recalled much to her. For one thing it identified the fluttering bit of bunting with its three upright red bars cut by one horizontal, at the masthead of the Wind-spray. That appeared in a picture of her father's last ship.

Intent as he was in the business of wooing, Grant did not bother to remember that Aletta's father had commanded under the Pembroke flag for two decades, up to his death on a wrecked Pembroke vessel twelve years ago. Had he thought of that, it must have occurred to him that the girl surely had heard of the fight in which Pembroke's father had gone down.

Knowing her strange composition as he did, that fact crossing his mind would have caused him to do something to nullify the girl's inherent tendency to side with the under dog. He would have seen that she might so consider Pembroke. But in the delicious, bewildering spell in which she enshrouded him, Grant did not remember; and so he promptly forgot both Pembroke and his ship.

After that she seemed inattentive to him at times, but on the whole she managed to maintain an air of sympathetic comradeship. When the *Manowac* reached Detroit, though, his vital question remained unanswered. To him the hours had been gorgeously entrancing, and, he flattered himself, he was at any rate a trifle nearer his goal. To her—Aletta was not quite sure.

He wanted to accompany her to her uncle's home. She would not let him.

As he put her into a machine she again mentioned the *Windspray*.

"You won't be too harsh in your—business relations with that little ship, *Ninian*?"

It was not a plea. Rather was it a renewal of the threat he had read into her former speech—that indirectly the affair with Pembroke might operate to his own disadvantage.

Grant cursed under his breath. What right had Pembroke and his rotten boat in her thoughts?

"Of course not, Aletta, if you say so," he asserted, while he resolved to make it painful for Pembroke, if not sudden.

She rewarded him with a smile and a promise to meet him in Detroit when he returned from Chicago a month hence.

"Perhaps"—in the shadow of the cab he could not see her narrowed eyes—"perhaps I'll be able to give you—an answer then."

With that for him to dream on she left him. And as she sped through the streets she did some very wide-awake dreaming herself. In this meeting with *Ninian* Grant something had been revealed to her. She had known certainly that he was domineering and driving in the struggle for what he wanted—except wherein she was concerned. She had known that he could be

implacable in dealing with opposition. She had not known that he was—vicious.

That was it. There had been viciousness in his attitude toward Pembroke. She did not approve of that.

For that reason Captain Noel Pembroke was wonderfully surprised when, before he had finished unloading at Toledo, he received an offer of a cargo for Buffalo. It consisted of automobile and tractor parts with, in addition, a deckload of boxed machines, to be loaded at Detroit.

There was nothing that Aletta Vanton could not have from her uncle, and he in turn was a big enough shipper to care little whether or not he offended the head of the Grant combination.

CHAPTER V.

PEMBROKE'S ALLY.

IT provided Aletta Vanton with rare amusement to see the *Windspray* run up and down Lake Erie. She looked forward to the day when Grant would raise the question with her. It would not be much of a problem for him to locate the source of Pembroke's cargoes. As soon as the trail led him to her uncle her own hand would be uncovered.

That was what she awaited. She was curious to find out what effect her practical alignment against him would have upon Grant. Considerable depended upon the manner in which he took it.

She was not sure whether she hoped he would turn out to be big enough to regard the affair as a joke on him. If he did that it might serve to alter the new impression that she had been forming since that day aboard the *Manowac*. In the beginning her effort on behalf of Pembroke had been made only because he was a struggler heavily handicapped—with possibly a thought that it might do *Ninian* Grant good to discover that his arbitrary schemes sometimes miscarried. Now it had developed practically into a test of Grant, a measure of his real caliber.

From her uncle Aletta learned of Pembroke's amazement when the first cargo had been offered. Recital of his outspoken

suspicion that it was a trick on the part of Grant when a return load from Buffalo had been tendered—that had pleased her. She had laughed over his amazement at the proffer of further freight.

The violet tinge had come to her thoughtful eyes. She had turned her head away, but her uncle had not wholly missed that light. He had asked no questions of her, but he had caused to be set on foot some intimate inquiry anent young Pembroke whom he remembered as the boy Noel. Aletta could choose her own way, but he would make sure that it was bright before she was allowed to tread it.

"But don't make it too easy for him," Aletta had commanded. "Give him cargoes for, say, the next month—until he gets on his feet. After that—"

From the unfinished sentence her uncle gathered that she wanted to see how Noel Pembroke could fight. He knew, of course, all about Pembroke's conflict with Grant, and what the girl's interference might mean, considering Grant's passion for her. Yet he made no attempt to advise her one way or the other. There would be time enough to do that when it became certain that she was making a mistake.

When it broke upon him, the situation made Pembroke dizzy. After the experience in Buffalo, when his cargo had disappeared along with his dock room, he had prepared to battle for every pound of freight. In place of that there was laid in his lap more than he could carry.

On the assurance that those who were helping him did so out of friendship for his father, he became convinced. On that assertion he abandoned the thought that his new-come fortune was ascribable to some deep purpose of Grant's. Never did he imagine that the girl of the lake could have aught to do with it.

None the less he often thought of her. Long before he was near Point Pelee when eastbound he had his glasses screwed into his eyes scanning the lake for her. Westbound he was similarly occupied as soon as the point hove in sight.

A couple of times he saw her in her boat, but never close at hand, although he slyly edged the Windspray off its course to bring

her nearer. He did not lend his glasses to Thompson, his mate, any more, as he had done on that first occasion. He did not believe Thompson properly appreciated.

The mate observed all that and smiled behind his skipper's back. It was funny enough that Pembroke should be running foul of the powerful Grant with his comparatively insignificant packet, but that he should be looking also in the direction of Grant's girl.

From Grant's angle the circumstances became unbearable when he discovered that Pembroke was being kept busy. As Aletta expected, it did not take him long to trace her connection. But he did not at once accuse her. That would have to be a last resort.

By overtures that had not failed previously in like cases he tried to have the shippers divert the freight from Pembroke. When that brought no result he made the request as a personal favor. They happened to be too substantial to be threatened. He suggested that he could provide all the cargo space they required—that they would be preferred in every way possible. They were sorry, but—

There was nothing left then for Grant to do but have the matter out with Aletta. He motored across the peninsula from Windsor without sending word that he was coming. He wanted to take her by surprise on the chance that he could at last ruffle that complete composure with which she always disconcerted him. If for once he could obtain and maintain the initiative, it might prove to be the opening wedge toward bringing her round to his way of thinking on matrimony.

From the ridge above her home where she was lolling in the sunshine, Aletta witnessed his arrival. His evident impatience over her absence, as communicated to her by his restless pacing on the porch, made her in no hurry to join him. When, after he had been waiting an hour, she did descend, Grant was not in the best of humor, though naturally he tried to hide that.

Never having seen him in such a mood before, Aletta could not but notice the tightened lips and darkling brows. Again she felt that she was meeting a new phase

in Grant—a phase that was not entirely likable.

She greeted him nonchalantly. He was brusque.

"Want to walk a bit, Aletta?"

The tone made her look at him sharply. It was not pleasing.

"If you like," she replied indifferently.

They headed down for the lake, a quarter mile away.

This interview she decided, would have large part in determining their future relations. Could Grant have seen into her mind he would have gone away without bringing up the object of his mission. He would have forgotten it absolutely, and Pembroke, too.

As it was, he did not come directly to the point. He was in doubt about how to bring it up. It was essential that her antagonism should not be stirred immediately—not at all if it could be averted.

Aletta broke in on his silence.

"Something on your mind?" she led quietly.

"Yes!" He stopped short, and she walked on a pace alone.

Her face flushed. She looked away out over the tranquil lake whose waters were lapping at their feet. Grant had not begun auspiciously.

She was smiling when she turned. The access of color had passed from her cheeks.

"Something serious?" Intentionally she aggravated him further.

Anger shone openly in his eyes. She was making fun of him when he already was mad clear through because others were doing just that. Unknowingly he frowned at her as he spoke abruptly:

"Do you realize you are making me the laughing-stock of the lakes?"

The girl's expressive face reflected innocence.

"How?"

"By getting cargoes for Pembroke," he rasped succinctly.

She did not deny.

"And why," her brows wrinkled thoughtfully, "why should that make you a laughing-stock? Nobody knows that I have anything to do with freight going his way."

Grant's head shook with exasperation. Good Heavens, what if any one did learn that! What a joke he would be!

"It's a—a mighty good thing they don't," he exclaimed, and thanked his stars he had caught himself in time to substitute "mighty" for what had been on his tongue. "That isn't necessary, however, to make a fool of me. You see, Aletta," he modified his tone, "I happened to remark awhile back that Pembroke would not be allowed on the lakes. I said so in public. Every day he remains makes it more embarrassing. Perhaps you can see that."

Slowly Aletta nodded. Primarily, then, it was his pride that was suffering. He wasn't vicious, as she had begun to fear. Or was it that his vanity for the time being counted more than the fact that he had a grudge to exercise against Pembroke? She put out a feeler on that idea.

"That is the reason I interfered," she stated frankly. "You told me, you remember, that there was no room for the Windspray nor her master. Later I heard—more details."

"Don't you think you might show some consideration for me?"

She hurled the query back:

"Are you showing any for Captain Pembroke?"

"What do you care about—"

Grant shut off as her eyes blazed. There was the stamp of the wild on her now. Her body seemed to be poised ready to react to the shock. Her lips pressed together so hard that they became bloodless.

"I didn't mean that, Aletta," he amended meekly. "Forgive me. I'm out of sorts." His laugh was a poor simulation of merriment. "To tell the truth," he added, "Pembroke has got my goat. They're snickering out loud at me—at me, as I said, all over the lakes."

His contrition softened the girl. But she could not give him sympathy for his wounded feelings. She told him so, and:

"Couldn't you take it in good part and yourself laugh the incident down?" Her face was grave: "It would be but small restitution for the wrong your father did old Captain Pembroke."

She rubbed him on the raw again. The Pembrokes never could be forgiven for the fortune it had cost to crush the old man. Apparently falling in with her suggestion, he became his usual suave self. Aletta saw the change, and smiled in gratification.

"It would give you so much more pleasure to know that you had permitted him to climb, than to have the memory that you had ruined him as your father ruined his father."

"That's so." Grant assumed a jovial air. "I hadn't looked at it like that. But—you understand, Aletta, that it will have to come about gradually—I mean the friendship between Pembroke and myself. You will grant at least that he should be allowed to make the opening move. Or that our coming together should be left to some natural circumstance."

She was willing to make that concession to his vanity. It would be too much to ask him to go to Pembroke and tell him that the feud was at an end. Pembroke would understand that when there came no overt act from Grant.

"That is fair enough, Ninian," she agreed. "You don't know how glad I am that you won't continue to be mean about it. It really wouldn't gain anything for you to injure him, would it, apart from a petty personal satisfaction?"

"No." His fingers brushed her hand. Her eyes were limpid again, and their depths held a meed of approbation for him.

"Now that is done with," he continued gaily, "there's something else I want to talk about."

The falling sun cast their shadows dancing out on the water as he renewed the story of his love. She listened more soberly. She must have been mistaken in that latest conception of him. A man could not but commend a greater admiration when, despite the abundance of power to do as he willed, he still retained the human element of forgiveness. And she did not deny that she did admire him for his strength and the position it had given him, as he admired her for her forthright, charm, and beauty.

He reverted to their talk on the Manowac.

"You promised, Aletta, that you would give me *the* answer soon." His voice throbbed in the dusk. "What is it to be, sweetheart?"

Aletta started. Almost she had let herself be carried away by his fervor. She did not wish to continue his suspense, but she could not give him his answer till she was sure in her heart.

For the first time in all their acquaintance her hand went out to him. Ecstatically he covered it with his, and for a moment she left it so. He was carrying it to his lips when, without seeming to decline the caress she withdrew it.

"It would not be fair to answer you now," she said earnestly. "I—I—" She did not quite know what she wanted to say. She could not banish entirely the impression that she did not know the real man—that only recently had she been given even a glimpse of him.

Furthermore, while she never supposed that he might not keep his word concerning Pembroke, she would not commit herself until what she accounted justice had been done in regard to him.

"I've thought so little about marriage," she went on gently, "that it never has been seriously in my mind. Now—"

Grant grew tense. He strained to see her face in the lim light.

"Now," he took her up with fast-drawn breath, "you will consider it—seriously?"

"I will," she replied simply, and he had to struggle to restrain himself from encircling her with his arms.

She sensed the danger, and unostentatiously stepped back.

"Let us go." She was fearful that the scene might get beyond control. She brought the conversation again to a safe basis: "You return to town to-night?"

"I have to, worse luck," he lamented. "I can come again in a day or so? Day after to-morrow?"

"In a week," she negatived him. "You must give me time to think, you know."

Grant dwelt in the clouds on the way up from the shore. The prospect was within his reach after two years of waiting! He started planning. They would be married as soon as she said the word—probably be-

fore fall. He would charter a yacht and they would go away into the Pacific, alone, to revel in happiness.

Then he ended much of the progress he had made. Why, he could not tell, but as he was leaving he asked:

"Have you met Pembroke?"

The question probably was innocuous enough, with nothing more than a touch of consuming jealousy behind it, yet to Aletta it had an unbecoming significance. Did he suspect that she had arranged with Pembroke to get him cargo? That she had gone to him and offered her help?

"I have not." Her voice was level, but inwardly she burned over the insinuation.

Again Grant hastened to smooth out the friction he had caused so ill-advisedly. He mumbled that Pembroke "was a good enough fellow." That was to emphasize his magnanimity. On the contrary it brought back to Aletta Vanton the doubts that had beset her—with an added decision to meet Captain Noel Pembroke and judge for herself.

CHAPTER VI.

"GRANT'S GIRL."

HOW she was going to approach Noel Pembroke when two days later she put off in her motor-boat as the Windspray came into sight, Aletta Vanton did not know. That, however, was a detail. If no plausible excuse occurred to her for invading his ship she would not hesitate to admit that it was plain curiosity.

From his bridge Pembroke experienced an extraordinary pulsing of the blood when he saw the little boat scudding toward him through the choppy sea. Thompson came up just then to stand a watch. He grinned at Pembroke, who hung rigid over the rail.

"Seems like the little girl is coming our way this time," ventured the mate.

"She isn't *little*," said Pembroke testily, turning his head in disapproval of the remark. "I've told you that before, Jim. She is—she is—" He stopped with a sheepish look and concentrated again on Aletta.

He shifted his course inshore and slowed.

Aletta swung over too, for, with the Windspray heading at a closer angle and at reduced speed, she would have cut far across the steamer's bows. It was to find out whether she really was going to the Windspray that Pembroke had maneuvered. The deviation of the motor-boat left no doubt about that. But while the fact brightened his face it also served to increase his puzzlement regarding her purpose.

The girl throttled down her engine, and, running parallel, closed in to within about thirty yards of the vessel.

"Oho, Windspray!" she cried—as though the two men on the bridge were not watching her every move; as though the helmsman's head was not sticking through the wheel-house window to keep her in sight as she hauled under the side of the ship; as though the two lookouts and three other deckhands resting forward were not giving her all their attention. Hearing her hail, one would have supposed that she had to arouse somebody on the Windspray to discover her presence!

Pembroke rang for slow. He opened his mouth to acknowledge her cry. Then he shut it without having spoken. She was Grant's girl.

"Answer her," he told Thompson. "See what she wants."

The mate stared blankly. He could not believe his ears. Here was Pembroke, who undoubtedly had had this girl a whole lot in mind, passing up a chance to talk with her! It was impossible!

"Don't you hear? Ask what she wants."

Thompson bestirred himself. The motor-boat was joggling in the seas, hard to handle at such slow speed.

"What can we do for you, miss?" he shouted.

On the spur of the moment the inspiration came to her. It was a reasonable enough explanation of her visit. She managed to keep her features straight.

"Can you spare me some ice, please?"

Pembroke advanced again to the end of the bridge. Ice! He felt cheated. He had hoped that he might be able to be of some service to her—although she was Grant's girl. And all she wanted was ice!

"Of course." He answered her himself. "Hold where you are while we bring it up!"

Aletta laughed fetchingly and smiled at the bronzed young skipper.

"It's so stupid—but there isn't a bit in the house. A lump will do. We'll get some in soon." Which was true enough, as far as it went, for just before leaving she had noticed that the chamber of the ice-box was almost empty. It was not necessary to mention that there was a well-stocked ice-house built into the hillside back of her home.

A sailor rustled two hundred-pound cakes from the refrigerator. Pembroke went down off the bridge, to see that they were lowered into the motor-boat without mishap.

"Come close alongside and look after your boat," he instructed Aletta, "and I'll put the ice aboard."

She did so without further words. The handling of her craft demanded her closest application, for in the nasty sea there was danger of being rapped against the Wind-spray.

Pembroke watched with some misgiving. It made him nervous to see her taking the risk of having her boat crushed and being thrown into the water.

"Pull away!" he shouted. "I'll put it ashore in a boat for you. Oh, Jim—man a boat!"

"No, no!" Aletta protested. "It isn't necessary to go to all that trouble." She was forced to swing her boat away. "See, if you'd been ready you could have got it aboard!"

"But what if the cake had slipped from the hooks and gone through your boat!"

His earnest solicitude struck a chord. She agreed with Grant's mumbled comment—Pembroke *was* a "good enough fellow!"

Her next inquiry knocked him off his feet:

"May I come on board?"

"Wh-at!" A frown topped his amazed ejaculation. Why should she want to board his vessel? Was Grant using her in some trick? Pembroke never had been able to down the belief that Grant would follow

up his promise with compound interest, because, so far, he had been balked from carrying it out.

His voice was cold, uninviting.

"It would be dangerous to attempt that!"

"Oh, no! I can make it all right. May I come?"

Noel Pembroke hesitated. The eagerness in his eyes showed how much he would give to have her board—to be near her, if only for a minute. But—The question ripped out before he realized:

"What for?"

The changed inflection brought her head up. What had she done to cause it? In her momentary abstraction her boat fell away and shipped some water. She righted it as Pembroke cried out a warning, and there was no harshness in his tone this time.

It dawned on her then what had brought the difference in his manner. She granted that he could not be blamed for suspecting she was there for some purpose of Grant's. Possibly to learn something which she, as a woman and a visitor, could ask without apparent motive. She aimed at once to remove that impression.

Her face upturned to Pembroke.

"If you get more way on it will be easy enough," she said; and, after that, replied to his query: "I'm coming on board because I want to. I know most all the boats except the"—the pause gave effect to it, and he liked the sound of his vessel's name on her lips—"the Windspray. Please drop a ladder and send somebody to take care of my boat!"

The assumption of authority amused Pembroke. In spite of his objection she took the matter as settled her way. Also—he did as he was bid, aglow at the thought that she was going to be near him.

With opportunity to study her close at hand, he found that she was even more captivating than he had dreamed. And it must be confessed that in his dreams he had pictured her as rather wonderful. She was dressed as she had been that other day: in short linen skirt and middy blouse, except that now her hair was prisoned in a wide tam-o'-shanter, with only a wisp trailing down on her right cheek. He liked her

better with the tresses loose. Aside from their wealth, they harmonized more that way with the breath of the outdoors which her whole appearance exuded.

He ceased mooning, and called to Thompson on the bridge to go to half-speed. The motor-boat kept pace while a ladder was put overside.

"I'm sorry—" Pembroke wondered why he should be apologizing when she likely was coming to spy on him; but he was. "I'm sorry we aren't a yacht so we could put down a regular plank—"

"That's all right—captain. I'll run close under now and your man can drop in."

That was done, and with the sailor running the motor-boat it rounded and made again for the Windspray.

Now that Aletta was about to make the leap from the boat to the swaying ladder, Pembroke was uneasy. He was glad that his vessel's freeboard was low. He bent over, ready to lend a helping hand.

Crouched springily on the gunwale the girl waited until the speeding boat was within a foot of the Windspray. She jumped nimbly and surely. Almost before his gasp of anxiety had sounded Pembroke was assisting her to the deck.

"Damn!" It was the faintest whisper, but he could not suppress it. He stepped away precipitately. He had no more than grasped her arms, but, by Jones, how he had thrilled at that touch!

That wouldn't do. He was too close—that was all; no more than close, though perhaps perilously so—to being in love with this girl whom he was meeting and speaking to for the first time.

After glancing about the trim deck of the vessel, she brought her eyes, still frankly appraising, to bear on Pembroke. His own gaze was defiant, but it did not waver. His jaw set grimly. He wished he did not have to distrust her. He could not forget that she was Grant's girl. That spoiled everything.

He decided not to open any further avenue of conversation. He would let her do that. She had come after ice—so she had said. Very well, he would stick to that.

"We'll put the ice in your boat while you're here," he said with restraint.

Aletta nodded, but did not speak, although it was plain that he was waiting for her to do so. She saw that he was holding himself in check, but she did not guess how much nor the actual reason. She put his aloofness down to her relationship with Grant. She sought to dispel it. She wanted Noel Pembroke to be friendly.

Since she had him before her, she went further than Grant's grudging remark. She liked Noel Pembroke, and she told herself that she would be glad to know him better. She hoped to make him perceive that.

"Thanks!" That was for the ice. Then: "Why do you stand so—so glum and icicle-like? Because I came for ice doesn't mean that you should try to freeze me in my tracks!" She smiled, and as he flushed added: "You are Captain Pembroke?"

"Yes. I didn't—"

"All right, captain, I didn't think you did," she interrupted. "I—like your little boat."

The words were so sincere that Pembroke warmed with pleasure, but instantly he discounted them. She was flattering him—greasing the ways for whatever constituted the actual ground for her excursion.

"Yes?" He said it listlessly, as a politeness, and strove to detach his glance from the velvet-tanned face, and—the tammy was crumpled in her hand—hair in which the sun created such wondrous, lustrous shades. His teeth gritted. It was unfair of her to invade his ship; unsportsmanlike of Grant to send her.

Aletta attempted again to remove his patent antagonism.

"My father sailed a Pembroke ship for many years."

"He did!" Her eyes lighted as Noel rose to the bait with beaming face. His enthusiasm subsided, renewed doubt possessing him. "*What ship?*"

"The Montcalm. I have a picture of her at home. I remembered your flag from it."

Pembroke's chilliness disappeared. Here was a point of union between them that might lead to—

"That was Captain—"

"Vanton," she finished. "You recall him?"

"I certainly do!" He looked at her as at some strange but gloriously desirable morsel. "But"—he laughed and she enjoyed the tang of it—"I have to admit that I didn't even know he had a daughter, far less—you!"

The crimson crept under her tan. There was no mistaking the compliment, and it was not unpleasant.

"That isn't very flattering! And I haven't even the small satisfaction of being able to retort that I didn't know of your existence!"

They laughed together, and after that, slightly abashed, they contemplated each other in silence.

From the bridge Thompson squinted down at them. To his way of thinking, Grant stood more than a fair chance of losing both ways! He chuckled as Aletta and Noel started talking at once like a couple of kids, completely at home together; and Thompson shrewdly deduced that each was talking to cover embarrassment.

These were to Pembroke the most delicious moments he ever had known. He took pride in showing the daughter of an old Pembroke skipper over the lone ship that represented the recrudescence of the Pembroke line. Her genuine animation reflected his feeling. From that he took added zest and forgot for the time that she had anything to do with Grant.

In the half-hour they were together he never spoke of the shipowner, even by indirection. Nor did she. But Grant was in the background of their thoughts all the while—especially those of the girl.

She could not but visualize him at Pembroke's side. He was rated a bigger man in the world, but was he? Financially, yes. But as a *man*—He portrayed strength, of course, but not as Pembroke did. Noel Pembroke's was the strength to do things—to achieve, if necessary, by physical energy, to go up against odds. Grant's was the sort that depended in greatest degree upon his ability to buy.

They came back from their tour of the vessel and went on the bridge.

"She's the dearest little ship," said Aletta again, and the tenderness in her eyes

was visible to him. She pulled the telegraph and the engines quickened. She turned to the man in the wheelhouse.

"What course, quartermaster?" she questioned.

"West, three-quarters north—steady!" grinned the wheelsman.

"Two points south, quartermaster," ordered Aletta merrily. "West b' south, a quarter south."

Pembroke laughed boyishly. A woman giving orders on his bridge! And such a woman! Now—

"Aye, aye, sir," responded the wheelsman automatically and corrected himself. "Aye, aye—*captain!* Two south it is—west b' south, a quarter south."

"There!" She smiled into Pembroke's face and his brain reeled again. "I've sailed your ship!"

Great contentment came upon Pembroke. Had he been a cat he would have *purred!* But since he was a man, he behaved like a fool, staring at the girl who made his heart pound so and unable to find a word.

"Wait!" She ran into the wheelhouse and he followed. The man who had just put the vessel over at her command looked at Pembroke, and on his nod relinquished the wheel to her. Her eye on the binnacle, she twirled the spokes, bringing the Wind-spray back to her proper course.

"West, three-quarters north it is, sir—steady!" she mimicked, and the wheelsman intoned it after her as he took his place.

"Well done!" applauded Pembroke. By Jones, she was wonderful!

She blushed, and her glance fell for a second before his intensity. She looked out on the lake.

"I—I'll have to go!" He was too excited himself to notice the faltering in her voice.

"It is roughing up!" she added, seeking, she knew not why, to justify her departure. "There are whitecaps now!"

It was like a douche of cold water to Pembroke, but he knew that she was right. Getting into her boat from the insecurity of the ladder would be task enough now without waiting till the sea became worse.

"I wish you didn't have to go—" He stopped in confusion. That was a remark-

able speech to a girl he had just met! He was relieved when she remained smiling and let it pass.

"It is advisable," he substituted. "Won't you let me put you ashore in one of my boats? It would save you the danger of jumping from the ladder."

"I can do it, thanks! It will be harder for your man to get back than for me to get away."

Pembroke did not try to persuade her. In truth, he would have been disappointed had she accepted his offer. That would not have been in keeping with the character and courageousness with which he had clothed her.

There was nothing of nervousness in her as she descended from the bridge and made ready to return to her boat. While they waited for the Windspray to lose way, she and Pembroke chatted with the comradeship of old friends. The embarrassment that had swept them in the first minutes of their meeting, when the mutual attraction had manifested itself, was entirely gone.

"We'll stop and swing off," he said. "You can jump when she starts to roll. That will give your boat room to pass close under without the risk of being stove in!"

She nodded her understanding. She would drop off the ladder as it stood away from the rolling ship's side.

His blood ran riot again in the moments that he held her shoulders while she steadied herself with her feet on the upper rungs. In a fraction of time she would slip away from him. Perhaps he never would touch her again—never see her.

Her eyes lifted to his face within a few inches of hers, and what she saw there startled her. And in the eyes that mirrored the longing in his heart there was something more than she ever had seen in Grant's, ardent as they would become. Something that sent a responsive quiver through her and made her frightened!

The tension snapped as it drove through their consciousness that the Windspray was beginning a slow roll over from the port side. The man in the motor-boat shouted and came in under good power.

"Now!" Pembroke whispered it close to her ear and a tendril of the dark hair brush-

ing his face blinded him. In a twinkling she was gone, his opening fingers, as he released her shoulders, trailing to the last lingering touch!

The sailor checked the motor-boat at the ladder, judging the distance perfectly. Aletta dropped lightly aboard. The engine roared and the small craft was out of danger.

Aletta's superb seamanship enabled them to get the sailor back to the Windspray. As that was accomplished, Pembroke became gloomy. She was going now; there was nothing more to detain her.

He felt uncomfortable about her position alone in the motor-boat, though he knew that his concern was needless. She was only eight or nine miles from shore, and while the whitecaps were breaking here and there she was quite able to ride the seas.

For a minute she continued alongside the Windspray. Hungrily his eyes clung to her. Grant's girl—she was Grant's girl! But—her father had sailed a Pembroke boat!

"Good-by!" She turned her boat about. "Good-by—Captain Pembroke!"

"Good-by!" He waved back. "Good-by—" Lord! how flat it sounded: "Miss Vanton!"

Why the devil hadn't he learned her given name? *Miss Vanton!*

He kept the Windspray at half-speed so as not to lose sight of her any sooner than necessary. Once or twice she turned to wave, but the need of handling her boat well in the rising seas did not allow of much inattention.

When she had merged into the shadows close to shore he took up the engine-room speaking-tube.

"Say, old man," he shouted to the chief, "d'you reckon you could squeeze something over your record of nine-point-four? Huh? You might? Of course I want it—just a spurt! Fine! And, say—tell your firemen I've a bottle of cocktails I won't need when we hit Detroit!"

Jauntily he strode over to the mate. His face was radiant.

"And, say, you, Jim!" He slapped Thompson on the shoulder. "Did you know that this"—the words rolled on his tongue—"is the *dearest little ship?*"

"Well"—the mate regarded him judicially—"I can't contradict you about the 'little,' as you did me, but—"

"Go to hell, Jim!" said Pembroke pleasantly. "I don't think she's engaged to—him, do you? She doesn't wear any ring. What? By Jones, you'll stand double-watch for that!"

CHAPTER VII.

BOYAN'S BOOMERANG.

BUT for that meeting with Aletta Vanton and the visions it had conjured, Pembroke might have yielded rather than tempt disaster to another ship under his command when the situation arose inside the week. Had it not been for Aletta Vanton, and the further fact that Ninian Grant was involved—that is, in the person of one of his ships.

Not that Aletta's influence had been required to reenforce Pembroke's backbone. That never had been bent. But the effect of the girl had been to intensify the snap and vim that ordinarily characterized him, to make him more than ever determined to win through. He had advanced in one bound to the stage where he told himself vehemently that she was *not* Grant's girl. She would not be until Grant's ring was on her finger.

The incident took place at Cleveland. After discharging at Detroit, Pembroke had been ordered to the Forest City for a cargo.

In a failing light the Windspray, from the west, was heading for the breakwater gap when another vessel, from the east, did likewise. It was the first sight Pembroke had had of the Manowac since the day Aletta had gone on board the big carrier.

Captain Pembroke gave no more heed to the other vessel than to note its appearance as a matter of habit. In the positions which they occupied they were in the relationship of *crossing* vessels because they were approaching each other obliquely. Having the Manowac on her port side, the Windspray had the right to hold her course and speed.

Under the circumstances it behooved the Manowac to alter her course or slow or

stop, if necessary, and go astern of the Windspray. If she desired, and there was room, she might pass to starboard.

The Manowac was farther away from the gap, but her superior speed, if maintained, would bring the vessels to the harbor entrance together. Such a contingency never suggested itself to Pembroke. Since they were in the position of *crossing* ships, the Manowac, beyond question, would concede the right of way.

Even had Pembroke known that Captain Frank Boyan was making up time on account of three days lost on his last trip, and that, moreover, he was half-drunk, Pembroke would not have anticipated anything not in the books. Above all, he would have said Boyan was a master mariner with respect for the safety of his ticket.

Therein Pembroke would have proved that he did not know Frank Boyan when he had too much liquor. In that condition the captain of the Manowac was not only unusually arrogant and violent, but he was inclined to recklessness. He was reckless, particularly, if it might endanger any one or anything against which he entertained bad feeling.

Thus when Boyan made out the Windspray as the opposing vessel, he swore roundly and measured the distance with jaundiced eye. He had a score to even for the beating he had received from Pembroke. He could not do that now, of course, but he could and *would* show the pup that his infernal packet-boat should have proper respect for its betters, the rules of the road notwithstanding.

Boyan rasped an order, and the Manowac went to starboard. Pembroke noted that, but found in it no occasion for comment or criticism. It was to be expected—to carry the Manowac astern of the Windspray.

But the next move of the Manowac, almost immediately executed, was totally unexpected. She came round at right-angles to port.

"What the deuce—" Pembroke's brow furrowed. What was Boyan doing? He was steering now for the dead wall, and if he held on would strike it a quarter-mile from the harbor entrance.

The Windspray still was a mile off the

gap. The Manowac was probably a mile and a half, and a third of a mile from the Windspray. Pembroke was making about seven knots—Boyan about twelve.

While Pembroke was trying to figure out the Manowac's strange maneuver, thick smoke began to roll from the big freighter's stack. That could mean only that she was firing up for speed. But why waste coal when half an hour would see her berthed?

Thompson joined Pembroke, and together they puzzled over the other craft's behavior. The mate found it equally inexplicable.

"Boyan must have a rip-snorter of a jag!" he grunted. "Never can tell what he'll do when he's like that. He gets away with some awful stuff and manages to keep his ticket clean."

"But this is insanity!" said Pembroke disgustedly. He hated to see a ship abused or badly sailed.

And then enlightenment was furnished. The Manowac let go two short blasts of her siren.

Pembroke and his mate looked at one another stupidly. It was unbelievable! Converging as they were into a cramped fairway, he could not do that.

For Boyan had presumed to put himself in the position of an *overtaking* vessel, and announced that he was about to pass to port of the Windspray. By shifting from his true course he had placed the Windspray, to all intents, practically abeam, whereas the ships had been drawing together at a broad angle of more than ninety degrees.

The burden, it was true, remained upon Boyan to keep clear of Pembroke's craft, but, at the same time, the latter had been robbed of her rights. When their reference to each other had been that of crossing, the road had been indisputably the Windspray's. It was hers now, but with the stipulation that she must not attempt to cross the bow or crowd upon the passing vessel.

If she continued her course, as she had to do to make the gap, she could not avoid crossing the bow of the Manowac, or, at least, crowding upon her.

"He's crazy!" snapped Pembroke.

"Sure he is!" nodded Thompson. "But I just told you he gets away with it, didn't I? Look out for him—he's tricky!"

Noel Pembroke reached for the siren cord. Had it been any other ship he might, considering that it was faster, have waived his rights. But not to a Grant ship—especially not to the Manowac or to Boyan.

Not when the picture of Aletta Vanton was constantly before him—when she, as likely as not, would hear of the incident. He did not want her ever to have the slightest excuse to think him a quitter!

"He can't do it! By Jones—*no!*"

Noel Pembroke hitched the cord around his hand and tugged it four times quickly.

"I can do some tricks myself, Jim! Let's see what *he's* got!"

The four blasts signified that he considered it unsafe for the Manowac to carry out her expressed intention of going to port.

That should have sufficed. But Boyan chose to construe the signal as meaning that the Windspray did not understand. He repeated his original two blasts. Also, he maneuvered his vessel closer to the Windspray, with the evident purpose of compelling her to sheer off.

Pembroke swore in anger.

"See if they can give us any more speed, Jim. That darned madman isn't going to get away with it this time. If we hit, he'll pay! It's our road!"

The Windspray trembled from stem to stern under every possible pound of steam. If Boyan wanted a race he could have it! In altering his status to that of an *overtaking* vessel, when there was insufficient sea-room, he had violated the most elementary rules. The ships therefore remained technically in the process of crossing. Even allowing that the Manowac was, in fact, an *overtaking* vessel, she could not make the four hundred-foot gap first without perilously crossing the Windspray's bow. The distance was too limited. She could not win the race, at any rate, unless Pembroke consented to drop out.

By this time they were no more than a hundred yards apart. The Manowac was a scant length astern.

With vicious pull Pembroke sent forth a series of blasts.

"He can understand that, by Jones!"

He repeated the danger-signal imperatively. The only answer from the Manowac was another pointing to starboard, which brought her still nearer the Windspray.

Pembroke hailed the offending ship. He was seething, but his voice was cold. He had not put up his wheel a spoke.

"All deaf over there, you blink-headed rat-catchers? Put your blistered madhouse astern! It's our water!"

A rattling assortment of language scorched the intervening wavelets. Captain Boyan was speaking. He summed it all up in English at the end:

"Aw, get out th' road!"

The vessels were dangerously close, particularly in view of the known crankiness of the Manowac. If she took it into her head to skid at this critical moment, anything might happen.

Captain Pembroke spat energetically into Lake Erie.

"Not on your life, you beach-combing yahoo!" he retorted with painful distinctness. He embellished that with smatterings garnered from five oceans and the Great Lakes.

With quick glance he marked the distance to the gap—four hundred yards. The Windspray was headed clear for the middle of it. The Manowac would have to cut sharply in to avoid striking the wall. If she did that she must ram the Windspray or be rammed. It was a toss-up!

Boyan made a last desperate attempt to gain his illegal point. His siren shrieked a stuttering staccato. He supplemented it by yelling what he had signaled:

"I am not under control!"

Pembroke turned his glinting eyes again to the gap. He laughed—so that Boyan heard it.

"You've nothing on me!" he shouted. "*Neither am I!*"

He meant that in more ways than one. It covered both the present situation and that in general in so far as it concerned Grant or anything pertaining to Grant, including Aletta Vanton!

Gibbering with rage, Boyan gave in. He had overstepped himself. In spite of his fuddled fury he realized that. He might

succeed in lying his way out of it somehow if he could at this eleventh hour avert collision with the Windspray. If he failed to do that his ticket was gone forever.

The Manowac's siren blared three times: "My engines are going full speed astern!"

While the notes reechoed, her propeller ceased its revolutions—hesitated—went into reverse. But it was too late.

There was sufficient way on the big vessel to carry her through the gap. She could not stop in the short space. All he could hope for was to check her impetus until the Windspray was clear.

To negotiate the entrance necessitated wheeling slightly more to starboard. Under the drag of the reversed engines the Manowac lurched sidewise. Her port quarter struck the end of the wall a glancing blow, buckling a dozen plates and carrying away the rudder. Then unaccountably she swung broadside on in the entrance and smashed her starboard bow on the other arm of the wall.

Looking back from his vessel, slowed down now to enter the mouth of the Cuyahoga, Noel Pembroke missed none of that. He never had relished any one's misfortune, but he could not quiet a chuckle as he added his siren to the Manowac's frantic skirling for assistance. A tug already was putting out.

"He's tricky, Jim," he said tersely, "but here's one trick he lost!"

"Ye-ah!" The mate was tickled, but he didn't enthuse. "But, skipper, if Boyan wiggles out of this I'd keep a search-light on him when he's within a hundred miles."

"Umph!" Noel was a bit contemptuous; he wasn't bragging, only recapitulating: "That's twice he's been made to back-water—"

"Then do your darndest to make it the third time and out before he gets a chance to land a wallop!"

The tugs were straining to release the Manowac, whose bulk filled all but ten feet of the gap. Her stern was free, but her bow was wedged on the riprap. Already they were preparing to shift cargo in the forward holds to float her off and clear the channel.

All in all it had turned out to be a costly race for Captain Frank Boyan. His ship would be laid up for a month, anyhow—if it continued to be *his* ship. He had some tall explaining before him, both to the board of inquiry and his owner, Ninian Grant.

The crash had sobered him, and when it was discovered that the Manowac was not seriously stove in he laid off anathematizing Pembroke long enough to give blasphemous thanks. There was only one other bright ray for him: His chief engineer was one after his own heart, and an accomplished liar who could be depended upon to stand by in an emergency. He went into immediate session with the chief.

Grant reached Cleveland next day from Chicago. He flayed Boyan for having put a boat out of commission when boats were gold, but at the same time he wanted to save Boyan if he could. On occasion he had been useful.

The master of the Manowac had remained decently sober since she had been towed in to be made tight temporarily until she could be got to dry-dock. He already had a story concocted for the inspectors. To Grant he explained what was nearer the fact, that he had tried to crowd the Wind-spray onto the wall or cause her to foul the Manowac. His scheme, he added glibly with a sly look at his owner, was to break Pembroke by wrecking him or through a claim for damages.

He said nothing about having been drunk. Grant suspected that, but overlooked it. An idea had come to him as through half-closed lids he had regarded Boyan.

"Rather heroic measures, don't you think?" he commented coldly. "Although he did give you considerable of a licking."

"Lickin'? Where d'y' get that? I c'd bat him to a jelly!" Boyan burst out.

"Oh, come, Frank," the other bantered, smiling. "Didn't I save you from being slaughtered by Pembroke?"

"Y're a—" Boyan caught himself on the ever-ready expression. He couldn't call his owner a liar.

Grant did not indicate that he had heard. Instead, he reiterated the point he had been making, his tone more aggravating.

"Lord! he had climbed all over you and would have done it again if I hadn't come to the rescue!" He noted Boyan's suffused face and returned to the question of the Manowac. He had planted seed enough. There was no doubt that it would be well-matured in Frank Boyan's heart.

"What are you going to tell the board about piling up the Manowac?"

"I'll get by." Boyan nodded confidently. "The chief 'll help out."

"How about this not-under-control signal of yours?"

"That's it. That's the alibi. You see," Captain Boyan winked, "we couldn't stop because our fires were going out. A couple of busted valves had the fire-hold flooded. We were trying to get in while we still had steam."

Grant frowned doubtfully. "What about the firemen?"

"All fixed—chief's taken care of 'em. And he *did* smash the valves after we got snagged."

The owner let it go at that. His eyes twinkled at the thought of what would happen to Pembroke if Frank Boyan ever got the chance. That, he imagined, would take care of itself.

"I'll testify for you, of course, at the inquiry," he said. "Hope you put it over."

Then maliciously he harped again on the sore spot:

"This Pembroke's always rough-riding you, Frank. Bad man, eh?"

He left Boyan sweating bloody thoughts over the parting gibe.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE KNOCK-OUT.

BEFORE the Manowac was ready to sail again, Boyan "put it over." Largely he had to credit Noel Pembroke for that. For, before the steamboat inspectors, Pembroke did not tell of the way in which Boyan had violated the navigation rules and brought disaster upon himself. He took a passive attitude, attributing the dangerous proximity into which the vessels had come to a misunderstanding of signals.

No blame could be attached to Pembroke.

Boyan had gumption enough not to dispute that the Windspray had the right of way. The verdict of censure was tempered when his explanation about the flooded fire-hold was accepted. As in several previous instances, he came out with a clean ticket.

But neither captain was under any misapprehension concerning the nature of their future relations. It was not because of an abounding generosity or altruistic charity toward Boyan that Pembroke kept silent about the real causes. The Manowac's skipper understood that thoroughly. It was because Pembroke wanted Boyan to remain on the lakes so there might be a final and decisive clash.

Another step in that direction took place that very day. From the hearing on the Manowac case Pembroke went to consult about a freight engagement. It did not pan out and, piqued, he was returning to his ship when he encountered Boyan after dark on the water-front.

They passed each other under a sputtering arc, by the light of which a gang of longshoremen were trucking aboard a vessel. Boyan, loud-mouthed and quarrelsome, was talking with a companion. He had been celebrating his acquittal.

Noel gave no attention to the two men. He preferred to have Boyan as sober as possible when the reckoning took place.

But in his present state Boyan was not disposed to let well enough alone. He made a leering, insulting remark.

Pembroke kept eyes front and walked on. Frank Boyan was encouraged. He stopped and turned, gripping his companion and pointing after Pembroke. He remembered what had stirred Noel before.

"Yah!" His bellow echoed over the dock. "Lookut the Hun! There's the boy—the guy that sinks ships for the Hun!"

Ten yards away Pembroke wheeled like lightning. The longshoremen, attracted by Boyan's shout, paused in their work. With one accord they dropped their tasks as Pembroke strode forward, his fists clenched and shoulders hunching. To their practised judgment it looked as though it might be a good fight!

This time Boyan did not intend to be beaten to the punch. As soon as he saw

Pembroke had taken the challenge and was approaching, he rushed with arms going like flails. His method of attack was that of the Hun he had just accused Pembroke of aiding—he counted upon weight and the initial impetus to give him speedy victory. Like the Hun, too, he found that he was wrong.

Pembroke halted and let him come. The shock, however, coupled with a blow on the side of the head, carried him back a pace or two. He had expected that, but he had not observed a plank lying underfoot. He was rallying himself well when he tripped over that. Ere he could recover, Boyan was on his back, bearing him down.

On hands and knees, Noel hugged his face close into his chest while he heaved with all his strength to displace the assailant who was clamped, leechlike, upon him. The impression he had formed on that first meeting with Boyan was clear in his mind—Boyan could not last long in strenuous effort. Pembroke, therefore, was willing to maintain his attitude, like a wrestler huddling to the mat, while the other expended his energy seeking to overthrow him or land effectively on his well-protected head.

While he struggled to press Pembroke flat to the ground, Boyan jabbed constantly to break through his guard. Had he given calm thought to it he would have devoted his fists to the back of Pembroke's head, which was all that was uncovered. But with the brutality that belonged in him, he wanted to reach the face, to leave marks that would remain.

The gang of workers gathered around directed their urgings at Pembroke, since he was the one then at disadvantage. They hoped he would win his way to his feet and prolong the contest. They did not wish to see it cut short.

None thought of dragging Boyan away and allowing Noel to get up. It was a man's fight. He was close enough to the rules as long as he didn't use the boots!

Boyan shifted his attack to a tremendous assault on the ribs with knees and fists. He brought a heel crashing back against Pembroke's thigh, but still he failed to bring him down. His leg was drawn up to repeat that move when Noel resumed action.

Choosing the moment when he felt that Boyan was at an insecure balance, he pitched suddenly on his side. The wrench robbed Boyan of his vantage. He sprawled away, his hands groping to retain a hold on Pembroke's body. Before he could succeed, Noel wriggled loose and sprang to his feet.

The growing crowd cheered. They had begun to be disappointed lest the fight was done!

Wiping the streaming blood from a gash over his right eye, Pembroke stood waiting for his man to get up. He was placid as a June sky. But his face was molded in lines of marble, except that he smiled ever so slightly as Boyan looked up dazedly.

It was the sort of smile that makes a person think twice before going against the man who wears it. Boyan did that.

So far he had not received a blow that amounted to anything. But his exertion in belaboring Pembroke so ferociously already was telling on him. He was panting; his alcoholic heart was thumping painfully.

Consequently he hesitated while Pembroke, cool and fresh despite the battering he had taken on his ribs, stood back with arms hanging loose, relaxed, but ready, giving him a chance to defend himself.

The longshoremen began to hoot. Their thoughts were not kindly toward one who hung back as Boyan was doing. They advised Pembroke wordily to pay back in kind and step on the master of the *Manowac*.

"Gwan, Jack," they hailed, with easy familiarity born of the fact that Noel had shown himself a battler and a square guy. "Go get 'im! He's a quitter!"

Pembroke glanced around. He smiled again at the group of rough but friendly faces clear under the arc light.

"Up, Boyan!" he commanded quietly, deadly menace in his tone. "I'm giving you that chance. If you don't get up, I'll come after you—for, by Jones, I'm going to knock you cold!"

The crowd roared approval. A policeman appeared, but the longshoreman induced him not to interfere. The word that Boyan was quitting decided him—he was a dockman himself and had the natural distaste for one who wouldn't go down fighting.

Frank Boyan did not quit, however. That was not greatly to his credit—it was because Pembroke refused to let him. He delayed as long as he could to regain his wind and got up only when Noel moved impatiently on him.

What followed was brief, but it aroused the bystanders to profane but sincere joy.

As Boyan squared himself and prepared for another rush, Pembroke sailed straight in. His freshness and skill counted immediately. At the first contact Boyan realized that the tide of battle had turned.

Planting both fists fast to the head, Pembroke followed with a tattoo over the heart while his opponent rocked on his heels. Boyan grunted under the punishment, and swung wildly as he gave ground—a random haymaker, which took Noel on the ear. But Pembroke let his head go with it and the force was lost.

A minute they stood toe to toe, slugging. Pembroke did not escape unscathed, but he gave four for every one he received.

Then Boyan retreated, cursing through swollen lips, but still fighting with all the wicked ferocity of the cornered rat. One of his eyes was closing. His breath came in fitful gasps. His heart was skipping—then overrunning itself. His knees were growing wobbly.

Backward, step by step, he went, Pembroke, noticing the symptoms, giving him no rest. It was simply a case of biding his time till his man would be virtually at his mercy. All Pembroke wanted was that the other would continue on his feet until the finishing punch could be delivered.

A heap of pig iron put an end to Boyan's retirement. His back to all intents against a wall, he fought with redoubled vigor. If only he could land one—just one of these increasingly erratic swings—in the right place—

The policeman started through the crowd to stop it. Pembroke backed a step. An oath ripping from his bruised mouth, Boyan leaped after him.

Noel Pembroke laughed and set himself. That was what he had wanted—Boyan to follow him. For, attacking in an access of desperation, Boyan left his face wide open.

Coming full and flying from the hip,

Pembroke's fist hit him flush on the jaw. Up on tiptoe Boyan hovered for a fraction of time, his one good eye staring, his mouth falling open. Then he toppled backward, his head struck on a pig of iron, and he lay still.

It was irregular, yes, but Noel Pembroke didn't even go to the station-house. The longshoremen, with their whole-hearted appreciation of a fighter, talked their friend, the cop, out of his duty. He gave in when the ambulance surgeon announced that Boyan was not seriously hurt, although he needed half a dozen stitches in his scalp and others at random places about his face. On the spot he put three stitches in the wound over Pembroke's eye.

And, while Captain Frank Boyan went to the hospital for overnight at least, Captain Noel Pembroke continued to his ship, not exactly proud of what he had just done, but—well, not displeased. What was it his mate had warned him? To make it three times and out? That was the third time, but was it out? Whether it was or no, he thus far held all the honors.

Grant had declared the lakes closed to him. He had proved the contrary. And in doing so, he was in a fair way to prove further that there was not room on the lakes for both himself and Grant's pet skipper.

CHAPTER IX.

UNDER THE GOAD.

AS suddenly as it had come the pendulum of fortune receded from Noel Pembroke. With the arrival of July his supply of freight ended. Not only that, but as a natural consequence he ran into fresh trouble in obtaining dockage. His shippers had been attending to that. With the withdrawal of their patronage—he was not unaware that they were forwarding as extensively as ever—they had other use for the wharves under their control.

It was an upsetting blow to the castles Pembroke had begun to build, but he accepted it as part of the battle. It merely increased his reckoning with Grant; for Pembroke could not but assume that the

screws at last had been brought down hard on those who had been helping him.

He did not argue nor plead. He asked no explanation. Thankful that the traffic which thus far had kept him going had given him a stake, he took up the fight where he had been six weeks before. He had something to be grateful for, anyhow—he was better equipped than he had been, both financially and in the point of incentive. In the latter respect he included Aletta!

With comparatively light heart and all his old-time confidence, therefore, he went at it. There were freights to be had. It was up to him to go get them. But he did not find that easy. Grant was too strongly entrenched.

Rapidly the Windspray became in truth a tramp, scouring the lakes all the way to Chicago and Duluth for whatever she could pick up. And that was frugal enough fare, serving little more than to keep the bank balance intact and cover running expenses.

In the middle of August Pembroke returned to Lake Erie. He could stay away no longer. If it meant starvation and ruin he was bound to see Aletta Vanton again.

In a fever of anticipation he went down the lakes, light, after discharging a small cargo of hardwood at Muskegon. He longed for those periods of consuming anxiety that had at once elated and disturbed him when he had neared Point Pelee. Drawing nigh to it there had been the fear that he would not see the girl. Then if he did sight her, the pulsing dread that she might not go close to the Windspray. And when she did that, there had been the throbbing pain because she was beyond his reach.

That was what he hungered for—a glimpse now and then of Ninian Grant's girl; a word with her as she jogged alongside in her motor-boat. For that he gave up his better chances on Michigan and Superior, where at least he had been making ends meet, to carry the contest to the lower lakes that already had refused him cargo.

At Detroit he came face to face with Grant. Pembroke was out drumming freight and frowning over the fact he would have to draw on his reserve funds to pay his coal bill. The powerful ship-owner was leaving

a directors' meeting, gay over the swollen war-profits that had just been announced.

Pausing in the street, they eyed each other. Grant nodded with smiling, impertinent tolerance. Giving back the smile, Pembroke reflected nothing of defeat. They did not speak. But that afternoon Noel adopted the old weapon of the Grants that had overcome his father. He cut rates to a couple of small shippers to whom every nickel counted, and he got their business.

He believed he had Grant buffaloed there. If Grant underbid him to these men he would have to do likewise to every one, or face charges of discrimination before the commerce commission. To cut all round on the hundreds of thousands of tons his vessels were carrying, to gain no more than the elimination of an insignificant atom like the Windspray, would be folly. This was different from removing a whole fleet from competition.

And as he took his step, Pembroke resolved that he would cut again, clear to the bone, if that were necessary to allow him to complete the season on Lake Erie. It was worth while, if it would bring him once in a while within range of Aletta Vanton. Which it did.

Another month went by before Grant came to know of the friendship between Aletta and Pembroke. He was motoring up the shore to visit the girl when he saw her sailing alongside the Windspray. Stopping his car, he watched till her boat put back to land, leaving no doubt as to its identity. Then he returned to Detroit without having called on her. In his present frame of mind his last possibility of winning her would have been lost.

Impatiently he waited at Detroit till the Manowac passed down. He purposed adding more fuel to Captain Frank Boyan's hatred for Pembroke. Taking the quickest way about it he reverted to their clashes in fisticuffs and navigation.

Captain Boyan jumped, kicking the chair from under him. He became blind with anger—so much so he could not observe that he was being baited.

Sprawled back in his seat, Grant lit a cigar and let him rave. Over him towered

Boyan, his scrawny mustache standing out from his bulging lip.

"That's gratitude!" jeered Boyan when he attained coherence. "You wanna get this bird out the way—yes, you do! An' when I try to help y' out, y' keep throwin' up that he licked me! He didn't! The first time you butted in, an' the second I'd have half killed him if I hadn't banged m' head."

Astonishment chased over Grant's features. It gave way to amusement as Boyan stood, uncertain about what the result of his remark would be.

Grant's tone was kindly, chiding—and on that account doubly irritating:

"You're *queer*, Frank—crazy!" A dry chuckle accompanied the words which came between puffs at his cigar. "I want to put him out! That's rich! Why, my dear Frank, I don't care a solitary damn about Pembroke. He isn't doing *me* any harm—he—didn't *beat me* up!

"Agh!" Boyan whirled on his heel and stamped about the room. He paused again in front of Grant, his head outthrust, his eyes protruding.

"I guess y' ain't sore about"—he realized he was going pretty far and wound up in a torrent—"y' ain't sore about somebody gettin' him cargo and visitin' him every time he passes. *Y' ain't* sore about that! Oh, no!"

His lips wreathed over his teeth unpleasantly in anticipation of an explosion from his owner. It did not come. Grant merely sat up and yawned.

"That, too, is a joke." The reply was unruffled, but in the speaker's eyes Boyan read something—or thought he did. "A joke, Frank, that doesn't bother me at all."

Captain Boyan scowled. He did not believe that. He knew Ninian Grant fairly well. The ship-owner had a reputation for not considering anything a joke if it infringed upon his preserves.

Emboldened by Grant's passivity, Boyan snorted. He'd show who had the sand to even the score.

"Gwan! Quit if y' want!" he snarled. "I'll be damned if I will. I'm gonna—"

"Sure, Frank, sure," interjected Grant soothingly, "but for Heaven's sake, take

help along—don't let him beat you any more!"

"I'll flatten him—flatten him and his blasted ship! I'll—" Boyan roared.

Ninian Grant arose and his upraised hand forced Boyan to quiet his fury. Briefly Grant was silent. He stretched languorously as his eyes held Boyan's.

"Quite so, Frank, but"—he smiled and his voice was meaningful—"but for God's sake, be *more careful* with my property. Just a little more careful—*next time!*"

The Manowac passed down the Detroit River four hours behind the Windspray in the early days of November. It was a reeking, dank morning with promise of thicker weather. Captain Boyan gloated over that. The period of waiting for a chance at Noel Pembroke had been long. Now he had the Windspray not far ahead—in a fog. He could ask nothing better than that!

Had he not stopped to rout out Ninian Brant when he heard the Windspray had scarcely passed down, Boyan could have remained within sight of the other craft. He was satisfied, however, that his speed would enable him to come up with Pembroke, who always steered a fair course. And he felt that it might help later on if the owner himself happened to be aboard. Grant's testimony would count for much if it became necessary.

When summoned so urgently by Boyan, Grant had responded without knowing what was toward. Told that Pembroke was at that minute heading out into the lake, and invited to make the trip on the Manowac, he had demurred. But Boyan convinced him. Grant wholly realized the possibilities—safe possibilities—contained in that fog.

CHAPTER X.

THE "ACCIDENT."

THERE were patches of mist on the lake as the Windspray emerged from the river. Ships and tugs and uncouth barges were making a babel with their many-tongued horns as they felt their way, one moment clear-sighted and the next blind in a bank of fog.

"Going to shove along?" queried Thompson. "It'll be a blanket soon."

"Yes." Pembroke judged likewise. "We may as well make all the time we can before we run into the thick of it."

They drew out of the busy waters at the entrance to the river and he instructed the engine-room to give the best that was in her. The scattered fog was not consistent enough to prevent the Windspray making full speed. That was no more than the "moderate" of most other craft, as prescribed by the regulations. Intermittently the siren foared in long-drawn warning.

In the depressing, shrouded hush, Pembroke fell to moping over the fact that he would not see Aletta Vanton. She would not be out on a day like this. He fingered a letter in his pocket—he wanted so much to show her that. He resented being robbed by the weather of the all-too-few bright minutes with the girl that had relieved the drab of sailing these circumscribed seas. He was on tenterhooks as to what she would say when she saw this letter headed: "Board of Admiralty, London." It meant a lot to him—the letter itself, and Aletta Vanton's attitude regarding it.

Pembroke was looking forward to and dreading the close of the season in another month. He would be glad when that permitted him to return to the wider and freer spaces of the ocean without the appearance of having surrendered to Grant. He would thank the ice for that release.

But against that he had to reckon the utter emptiness when he *never* would see the girl who had come up out of the lake to hallow the deck of his ship. With Aletta Vanton removed from the picture there wouldn't be any picture. That was why he wanted her to see that letter new-come from London.

Before the Windspray was thirty miles out the fog shut down solid. The siren was hooting every fifty seconds, but Pembroke had not reduced speed. Time enough to do that when there was some sign of another vessel.

To starboard he recognized a whistling buoy off Point Pelee Island. Soon he picked up the wailing of the fog-signal on the Point itself, twelve miles northeast.

The clamor of another ship's siren reverberated suddenly through the murk. Thrown back and forth by the masses of the fog, it was impossible to tell the direction of the sound.

Pembroke's hand closed on the telegraph. Fixed signals could be identified by tone and duration. The compass gave their general location. A ship was different. It might be anywhere, and perforce demanded caution.

"Where did that come from, Jim?"

The mate was staring in vain to penetrate the veil, and listening intently for the next blast. He could not see more than ten feet from the bridge. His arm hung on the cord, and the Windspray sent her warning answer crashing out.

The other ship rumbled again. Thompson shook his head and his reply did not enlighten Pembroke any.

"Search me. She isn't far away, that's sure, and she came up darned quietly."

Pembroke rang for half speed.

"Seemed to be astern," he opined.

"I thought it might be ahead," the mate differed; "to port."

"Keep shouting every thirty seconds till we make her out."

That was all Pembroke could do except proceed with even greater care. The two sirens took up an answering chorus, sustained and hideous in the clammy damp.

Pembroke shoved the lever to "slow."

"Quiet for a minute," he ordered. "Let the other fellow do the talking, and see if we can place him. I don't believe he's very close—not dangerous—" He broke off in the middle of the word. "What was that?"

With the exclamation he signaled for full speed astern. A shout from the lookout confirmed his alarm. The Windspray had struck something.

A cry for help came out of the gray muck. A woman's cry! And at the first word Pembroke recognized Aletta Vanton's voice!

The telegraph jangled to "stop" as he sprang from it across the bridge. The girl's voice rose again, muffled in the fog, but not far off.

The lingering drone of the other vessel resounded. Above its din Pembroke, al-

ready on the rail, cried to the mate to drop a boat. Fully dressed as he was he went overboard.

A few yards and the ship, now coming to a standstill, was blotted out. He treaded water and called:

"Aletta! Aletta!" He did not think it curious that he should be calling her by name!

In the water, not twenty feet from him, the girl smiled. Her motor-boat, stern shorn away, had just foundered. She was quite calm, however, and her keen ears had not failed to observe the quaver in Pembroke's voice—nor that he was seeking "*Aletta*."

"Here I am—Captain Pembroke." The Windspray *hooded*. "Oh, bother that siren! Here—right near you."

She swam, threshing the water to attract his attention. His hand met hers. His arm slipped around her.

"You aren't hurt, Alet—Miss Vanton?"

She laughed at his return to formality.

"No. You shouldn't have come after me. I'd have been all right till you got a boat down."

The arm about her tightened. Shouldn't have gone after her! The idea made him gasp. Good Heavens! What if she had been injured in the collision and unable to cry for help! She would have drowned while he searched for her! She would have been killed by his confounded ship!

"My dear—" The siren swallowed up the rest of the words, but the inflection of what she heard conveyed plenty to the girl.

A halloo echoed out of the fog. The more composed of the two, Aletta sent back a hail. Pembroke added his shouts, and oarlocks chunked as a boat nozed toward them.

In the next two minutes Noel Pembroke fought to repress his emotion. It took all his power to abstain from kissing the molded curve of her cheek, so close to his as they swam slowly.

Once he did press his lips to the tumbling wet hair that clung about her shoulders. He had thought she wouldn't notice, but she did. Her head turned quickly and his eyes fell. It had been unfair to take advantage.

Had he not avoided her glance, fearful that he had aroused anger, he would have

been saved some hours of uncertainty before he learned that she—

An oar scraping the side of his head brought him to his senses. He shoved it away, but retained hold.

"Look out or you'll brain me!"

He pulled at the oar and a boat loomed shadowy. Aletta was lifted aboard, and Pembroke clambered in. The ringing of the ship's bell, augmented by megaphonic rumblings from the mate, guided them back to the Windspray.

Neither Pembroke nor Aletta spoke until they were on the deck. She laughed at her bedraggled appearance and shook out her soaking skirt ruefully. She unfastened the buttons of the great peajacket she wore over the heavy corduroy.

The Windspray got under way again.

"Haven't been able to locate the other fellow," reported Thompson from the bridge, "but he seems to be astern, as you said. That's the Point blowing now."

"Just keep her moving," replied Pembroke. "There's plenty of water."

He had not taken his gaze off Aletta. He was wondering what he would do with her.

"You'll have to get out of these wet clothes, my dear," he said, "but what in the name of goodness you're going to wear, I don't know!"

Her rippling laughter was like wine to him.

"I won't shrink in the little while till I get ashore."

"That's the trouble." Pembroke's fingers scrubbed over his chin. "I don't see how you're going to get ashore. I'm short-handed. If I let a boat go it probably never would find me again—even if it succeeded in landing you within ten miles of home. You see what I mean?"

The deep eyes, shaded with violet, searched his face. She nodded without knowing that she was doing so. She was not afraid to trust Noel Pembroke.

Her common sense and knowledge of the weather told her that what he said was true. A small boat might flounder around aimlessly for hours as she had been straying when she was run down. Her aunt would not be unduly alarmed if she did not get

home out of the fog for some time, but she would expect word of her safety from somewhere.

There was no way of communicating with shore from the Windspray—she had no wireless. It might be two or even three days before she would make port if this smother continued. She was sorry her aunt would be frightened, but there didn't appear to be any way out of it.

"You are going straight to Buffalo—as straight as this blanket will let you?"

"Yes." Her cheerfulness relieved him. "If it clears so we can put in anywhere I'll land you."

He prayed that it would not clear. If he could have his way, the Windspray would remain at dead-slow for the rest of the trip. He visioned entrancing hours with Aletta Vanton on the bridge beside him. And, just a little vindictively, he thought of the fury that would eat into Grant when the girl had been so long on the despised and unwanted Windspray with her equally despised and unwanted master.

"Oh, well"—Aletta was quite self-possessed—"I suppose I'll have to make the best of it. I'll go through with you to Buffalo."

Her thoughts went back to nearly six months before when Pembroke had first entered her vision. He had been the cause of her making a trip that day, too—when she had gone to Detroit to get freight for him. It had pleased her to do that. It pleased her more to be near him here on his ship, shut in by the fog.

"And now"—she laughed thrillingly but somewhat breathlessly as she put away such thought—"you can turn me loose among your wardrobe and I'll find something to wear. They won't be so terribly strange, you know—I have a saddle horse I use some times!"

He stepped over with her and threw open the door of his cabin under the bridge. Switching on the light, he threw up the lid of a chest.

"That's your choice," he smiled. "There isn't—"

Again the bellow of a siren interrupted him. He started.

"That's right alongside!"

Thompson yelled and held the cord down. The shattering riot of noise shook the vessel as the steam rushed through the throat of the horn without check. For a full minute it kept on.

Captain Pembroke swayed between his place on the bridge and Aletta Vanton. His duty won.

"Pardon—" He was gone as he spoke.

Standing in the doorway, her head moved in approbation as his distorted silhouette mounted the bridge ladder on the run. She would rather have him at his post, prepared to face the danger.

An uncanny silence had fallen. There was no sign of the other ship. Tensely Pembroke and his mate waited.

"Why the devil doesn't he answer? Give him another, Jim."

The Windspray shrieked again at top pitch. As the groaning note died away another took it up.

"Port—hard over!" roared Pembroke, and his voice carried somehow through the vociferous braying. "God! She's on top of us!"

A giant bulk grew out of the opaqueness, driving at the Windspray amidships. The little vessel obeyed her helm well, but she could not escape.

The bow of the colliding vessel struck just forward of the bridge. Biting deep, it bore the Windspray over on uneven keel and thrust her, staggering, sidewise.

Thompson made out the huge, tarnished gilt letters as the bow of their destroyer, in the reaction from the crash, quivered within four feet of the end of the bridge.

"The Manowac!" he shouted in Pembroke's ear. "Boyan's getting even!"

There was a grinding and a shearing as the big carrier drove on, tearing whole plates from the smaller vessel.

Pembroke nodded jerkily. His eyes were fastened on the bulk of the Manowac scraping alongside. She had skidded as she stopped and the ships lay broadside on, touching one another.

"Get the girl, Jim!" He could not leave the bridge to go for her himself. His first duty was to save all his people. "She's in my cabin. Hurry!"

There was commotion aboard the Mano-

wac, with men running and cursing. Above the others he could hear Captain Boyan. Compared to the orderly quiet on his own ship while his men went to their stations, the Manowac was a madhouse! The vessels lost way and together rolled sluggishly.

Pembroke smiled grimly as the sharp bells from the engine-room of the other vessel told him that those on the Windspray would have to shift for themselves. The Manowac was backing away.

Clear over the ship his voice rang in a command to put out the boats. He was cold as ice, concerned only over the safety of his ship's company. Taking up the speaking-tube, he talked to the engineer, who was standing by his stilled engines awaiting orders.

"Shut everything down, chief, and come up." Every accent was bitten off. "Everybody on deck. We're down by the head."

Steadily he pulled the siren-cord—the distress-signal. And out of the sullen quiet came a shrieking, frantic cry. It was Ninian Grant blighting the life and soul of Captain Boyan for having abandoned the sorely stricken craft, commanding him to return and lend assistance. For, in the brief scrap of time that the Manowac and the Windspray had lain side by side, Grant had seen Aletta Vanton, startlingly vivid, under a deck light over Pembroke's cabin door.

CHAPTER XI.

THE PASSING OF THE WINDSPRAY.

ALREADY on her way to the bridge, Aletta met the mate. It seemed the most natural thing that she should make for Pembroke's side when peril was abroad.

Thompson ran on forward to find how the men asleep in the fore-castle had fared. After that he had to take charge of getting out the two boats aft.

Aletta's quiet voice at his elbow made Pembroke spin.

"We are—sinking?"

Her composure was admirable. He commended her silently while he answered:

"Yes! A few minutes—"

There was a noticeable list forward. The Windspray gave a lurch and settled deeper.

"Go aft and get into Mr. Thompson's boat," commanded Pembroke. His tone was soft but impersonal. He was the sailor now, saving the lives of his ship's company—nothing else. Aletta did not move.

The feet of the engine-room crew rattled on the iron rungs as they climbed to the deck. The escaping steam told that the chief had done his last service by opening the valves to blow off his boiler.

"Steady—there's time enough," said Pembroke. "Everybody to the boats!"

The five men, indiscernible in the fog, trooped away.

A boat splashed into the water. Thompson came under the bridge.

"All ready," he announced. "Waiting for you, skipper. Is Miss Vanton there?"

"Go along with him," Noel again ordered the girl. He pulled the cord and the siren croaked weakly. The steam was getting low.

Aletta took hold of his arm.

"What are you waiting for?"

"To see if that swine is coming back to lend a hand," rasped Pembroke.

"And if he does—" The girl shrugged. "He'll probably continue his Hun tactics and run down the boats. It was—deliberate, wasn't it?"

Noel Pembroke's laugh jarred.

"That may be hard to prove, but it looked that way. You know it was—the Manowac?"

"I suspected," she replied gravely. She had not seen Grant on the Manowac. "Come."

Only a watery whine came from the siren when he tried again. He dropped the cord. It was useless to try further to call aid. And, anyway, the Manowac had given no response.

The sharp slope of the bridge warned him that time indeed was growing short. He helped Aletta to the ladder.

"Get your boat over, Jim. We're coming. Anybody hurt?"

"Three—and one dead," said Thompson as he moved away. "Caught in their bunks. Got 'em away in the first boat."

The girl felt Pembroke's grip bite into her arm. His whole body drew up suddenly like whipcord. She heard him choke down

a bitter expletive as he piloted her carefully along the sloping deck.

Thompson had lowered away the boat on the port side before the stern rose so high in the water. With the heavy list the ship had to starboard, the remaining boat was easily launched on that side.

"Eleven in the port boat," said Thompson, "including the injured and the dead man. Eight here besides ourselves."

Pembroke rapidly counted noses. Everybody was accounted for.

He handed Aletta down to the mate in the boat, cast off the last of the tackle, and dropped in himself.

They rowed away in the oppressive quiet broken only by the faint hissing of steam. A black, oily swell was under them. The Windspray faded fast into obscurity.

Less than five minutes had elapsed since the Manowac had drawn away into the fog and there had not been as much as a murmur to show that she was anywhere near.

Their other boat was standing by. They blundered into it.

"One caved-in chest—one broken leg—one I don't know what's the matter with him—and one dead," reported the chief engineer in charge of it with grim frivolity.

Pembroke's teeth crunched together. He suffered with his injured men.

"Can we take a couple more aboard and give the poor chaps more room?"

"We're all right. Where 'll we head?"

"Stay close and we'll make for the Canadian shore. It isn't far off."

The men started rowing.

"Say," called the chief, "what d' ye think o' that murderin' hound? They tell me it was Boyan. Must've been going full speed?"

"He was." Again Aletta, sitting on the stern thwart beside Pembroke, felt him become taut in every nerve and muscle. "And—I don't think, chief. I'll let the court do the thinking."

From somewhere out of the fog a siren rumbled. Simultaneously there was a muffled explosion.

"The Windspray!" whispered Aletta, shivering closer to him. "She is gone—Noel!"

Both his arms encircled her. She swayed to his great tenderness.

"Gone, my dearest," he whispered back, "but there is a tally-sheet to be made up!"

Borrowing dry jackets from two of his crew, he removed the girl's soaking garment and wrapped them around her. She snuggled into his arms, content in their strong comfort and warmth against the dripping chill of the fog-laden air.

As the boats made their slow progress he held her tight, stroking her damp hair and cheeks—basking, it seemed to him, in heaven as she smiled happily at his caresses and whispered shy, soft words. This, in truth, would be the greater triumph over Grant; but although he exulted at that, it was a reverent exultation.

And while he lazed in his dream of bliss, he smiled again and again at the quirk of fate that he should have Ninian Grant and Frank Boyan to thank for it. For had they not assailed him he would not have returned to the Great Lakes and so he never would have seen Aletta Vanton.

It never appealed to him that now his vessel was lost he had nothing to offer her except what he could earn by his strength and skill. The insurance on the Windspray, with the damages he would recover and the tidy surplus he had laid away during the season, would just about meet his loan and mortgage obligations. But this mattered only in that it pleased him that he should come out clear of debt. So far as Aletta was concerned he had no hesitation. She was of seafaring stock and would know how to make a sailor's wife.

CHAPTER XII.

SIXTY FATHOMS DEEP.

AND while they floated on the bleak waters, wondering and a little frightened by the depth of their love, the closing scene of bitterness and tragedy was being enacted on the Manowac, out there in the impenetrable wall of fog.

That glimpse of Aletta on the Windspray had aroused Ninian Grant to realization of what Boyan, virtually his hireling in the sinking of the Windspray, had done. It

had borne in upon him that lives had been placed in danger; that he as well as Boyan might have to face a charge of murder on the high seas.

The spectacle of the gallows would have sufficed, but about it there was the immeasurably greater fact that the life of the girl he loved was imperiled. And, though it was in the way that one covets a beautiful possession and would cherish it selfishly to himself, Grant did love her.

When the Manowac backed away, then, leaving those on the Windspray to shift for themselves, Grant lost his perspective. The ships were not yet apart when he rushed onto the bridge and clutched Boyan. He began without explanation; he did not think of that.

"Stop your engines!" he screamed. "Stop them and stand by!"

Captain Boyan looked at him stupidly. He had primed himself well on his chase of the Windspray in preparation for the collision he had just carried out.

"Not by a damn sight!" he retorted. "Let the fish-head swim!"

Raving in his frenzy as the distance extended between the vessels and the Windspray was lost to sight, Grant pawed at the captain.

Boyan's ragged mustache bristled. Nobody could talk to him like that on his own ship. He assumed a semidrunken indignation which at Grant's excited insistency changed to anger. He also lost his head. He flung the owner of the Manowac aside.

"I'm skipper here, mister," he declared himself. "Geroff m' bridge!"

Grant's fury increased. Gathering himself from the wall of the wheel-house against which he had stumbled, he again seized Boyan.

"Stop, I say—stop this ship!" He shook Boyan impotently. "I'm the owner. Do what I tell you."

"Owner—hell!" Boyan ordered the wheel hard over and called for the engines to go from reverse to full speed ahead, which would swing the carrier far from the foundering Windspray. He laughed at Grant. "You're only a *passenger*! I'm running this."

Yelling a countermanding order to the man at the wheel, Ninian Grant saw it disobeyed; as the captain had said, his status was no more than that of a passenger. With violence he tried to shove Boyan from the telegraph, for the engines were stopping and in half a minute would go ahead.

Snarling an oath, Boyan drove his elbow into his owner's face. While Grant reeled he was pushed viciously the length of the bridge.

Boyan's befuddled brain was searching for a reason for Grant's actions when the propeller ceased revolving and remained so. He was shouting down the tube for the cause of that, and getting no answer, when the first officer hurried up the ladder.

"We're making water fast," he reported. "Firemen have quit—they're on deck now. Engine-room crew, too."

"Drive the swine back," sneered Boyan. "What y' doin' up here? Lookin' f'r help?"

"Yes." The mate was frank. "Let me take your gun. The crew's putting out the boat."

Boyan checked an enraged bellow. Perhaps the Manowac was badly damaged. He thought of his own skin as he asked the question.

"Couldn't the pumps keep it under if these greasy pups stayed on the job?"

"I doubt it. We're badly stove in—and we're full of ore. I'll ask the chief. How about the gun?"

"I'll keep that," rasped Boyan. "Hurry up."

The mate was disappearing when Ninian Grant picked himself up. He held a lantern on which he had rolled when Boyan cast him away. Well-built as he was he knew that he was no match for the captain. So, seeing red because of the rough usage that had been given him and the refusal to aid the Windspray on which at that instant Aletta Vanton might be drowning, he returned to the attack prepared. He stalked warily, the polished gentleman driven to brutality by brutality.

In the press of the more disturbing circumstance of impending disaster, Boyan had forgotten Grant. A smash on the head with the lantern awakened him to the knowledge that the latter was again on his feet.

Only Grant's anxiety to land a telling blow caused him to fail of that purpose. Instead of the heavy base of the lantern it was the globe that clattered on Boyan's skull. The thick wire that encircled the glass largely saved him, nevertheless, the fragments gashed him severely, and he was half stunned.

Retreating as Grant made another swipe with his queer but effective weapon, Boyan rushed before the other could raise the lantern for a new onslaught. If he could get to close quarters the battle would be his—he could break Grant's neck or back, or both! Grant also understood that and tried to dodge, but he was not quick enough. He gasped as Boyan's arms were wound around him with crushing force and a weighty boot stamped on his feet.

It was a strange struggle as the two men staggered about the narrow confines of the bridge, their close-locked figures ghostlike in the saturated gloom that was yellowed but not lessened by the light from the wheel-house.

They were quite oblivious to the shuddering jar that ran through the ship as she settled deeper with the water that was pouring in through the rent bow.

But that motion brought home to the steersman his danger, which so far had been but vaguely communicated to him by the noise and the stoppage of the engines. He left his post and, in so doing, ran into the fighting pair.

As he made out Boyan, puffing and cursing, but overcoming his adversary, the man hesitated. Like every one else who had served the master of the Manowac, he had no love for him. Wherefor, he took the opportunity that presented itself and on an impulse punched Boyan twice in the face. At the same moment Grant managed to get leverage enough to heave the lantern by its looped handle up against the back of Boyan's head.

Smarting with pain from the double attack, Boyan released his grip on Grant and threw him down. The wheelsman leaped away. Whipping the revolver from his pocket, Boyan fired twice without effect at the shadowy body that reached the deck in a bound and was swallowed up. Then

he spun back to face Grant—a tenth of a second behind time.

His chest and sides racked by the excruciating pressure Boyan had exerted on them, his toes mashed by Boyan's heels, Ninian Grant was striking with all his might. The lantern was descending mercilessly as Boyan turned and shot.

A weird, strangling cry burst from Grant as a bullet splashed into his throat. Another penetrated his chest and he wheezed as the blood flooded into his right lung. Bent and clawing at his wounds in surprised agony, he rocked back on his heels, the lantern clattering from his hand to the deck. But his work was done.

Even as Frank Boyan had fired the lantern had fallen with stunning force on the top of his head. In an ungainly heap he collapsed while Grant, with the last ounce of strength, made the final effort to maintain his balance and failed.

Returning to the bridge after a losing battle with the crew in which he and the other officers had been unable to prevent the launching of the boats, the mate heard the shots and met the fleeing wheelsman. He was going to advise Boyan that the Manowac was almost awash forward of her low waist and that the only remaining avenue of escape was a life-raft, over which he, the chief engineer, and the second mate had successfully fought off the men with iron bars.

The man declared he did not know the cause of the shooting and the mate went on and up to the bridge. The ship could not last much longer. He called Boyan, but got no response.

The lights flickered, dimmed, glowed in eery threads of fire, and went out. He understood what that meant—the water probably was seeping into the fires from which the stoke-hole crew had bolted without drawing them. It was doubly dangerous to delay, for now he realized that besides the danger of being sucked down by the sinking ship there was that of being killed when the boilers exploded. And the water must reach them soon.

Again he called Boyan's name, but the bridge was empty of sound or movement. A shout from the chief engineer urged him to

hurry. Taking it for granted that Boyan was no longer there, he went down the ladder.

"He must have got away while we were battling here," he told the others.

"That explains the shooting," nodded the chief. "It was Boyan busting his way into a boat, all right. Let's go."

It did not occur to them that the firing had taken place scarcely more than a minute before and that the boats had been gone twice that length of time. In a crisis seconds seem like long minutes.

So the raft with the four men clinging to it was floated off as the vessel shuddered another foot deeper into the water. While on the bridge Ninian Grant, owner of the Manowac, gasped wheezily and tried to rise or shout and could do neither; with Frank Boyan, master of the Manowac, stretched not ten feet away, his head in an ever-growing pool of crimson.

"And," continued Noel Pembroke, to the girl at his side in the life-boat, "I'm going back on the ocean, where there's room to turn around and a chance to strafe a U-boat. I'm cleared, thank God, by the Admiralty for the loss of the Kingfisher on Sable Island. What's more, Aletta dearest, the jinx is broken—I've been offered a real ship! Congratulate me, my Girl of the Lake, and tell me that you're glad."

"I do, I do, Noel, with all my heart." He hugged her discreetly, for the sailors in the nearest thwarts could see. Then with the others the man and his girl sat tensely upright as there came a rumbling that agitated the fog. It was the mate who spoke what was in their minds.

"By Heaven!" he blurted. "If that isn't the Manowac gone to glory, too!" The Manowac gone to glory, as he put it, bearing down with her in sixty fathoms her master and her owner who had contrived and paid with their lives.

It was an hour later, while still rowed through the fog, that Pembroke laughed softly.

"They said I was jinxed when I lost four ships in ten months," he twitted. "What will they say about you, Aletta, who had two sunk under you in an hour!"

The girl sighed.

"Perhaps, Noel," there was laughter in her tone, "you can give me the recipe to break the jinx as you have done."

"By Jones"—he held her away from him, his soul soaring to the heights—"by Jones, I do know how! We'll—"

"Something coming," interrupted the mate. "Better all yell together and see if we can make it hear us."

Busy in his love-making, Pembroke had not noticed the ship's siren coming ever

nearer. His rapt face changed into a grin. "That's the second time I've started to say a certain thing, dear heart—once when we were getting you out of the water, and now. But, by the great Jones, I'm going to save it till there's no chance of anybody butting in. We're about to be rescued. Let's get that over, and then—"

Her hands-cuddled into his and stayed there.

"I'll wait," she whispered, "wait dreaming, to hear—whatever it is, Noel."

(The End.)



Pendulums of Peace

by Paul Steele

PONDEROUS, pop-eyed, implacable, sat Marie Lacour in the wide, deep, strong armchair within the sitting-room of the Albereque Inn. Well over four hundred pounds of feminine flesh were wedged into that chair. Yet it fell not, for it was of oak founded upon iron.

Swathed in zebra-limned calico that no mere man's pen can describe, she looked like an ancient heathen goddess of something, perhaps of vengeance.

For in her dark eyes, seeming unnaturally round because of her bulging cheeks below them, now smoldered sparks of rancor. They were eyes that one would know had been beautiful and melting in her youth before had come this avalanche of flesh.

Upon this August morning in 1914 there was peace within the upper sitting-room of this picturesque inn far north in Quebec. But from the barroom below rose yowls of both wassail and war. An all-night orgy had been carried well beyond the dawn.

At last the din subsided. Upon the stairs sounded unsteady footsteps. A door opened and closed. A herculean, black-mustached, brutal figure stood weaving on trembling legs and glared at her. It was that of her husband.

"Go to bed!" she calmly directed.

He reeled toward her, his face distorted with maudlin anger.

"Who are you to ordaire me?" he bawled. "I, Pierre, am master here! Sow! Take zat!"

Heavily he slapped her bulbous face. Furiously he seized her wrists, trying to tug her from the chair. He might as well have tried to move a mountain. With a grunted curse he tumbled into his room, adjoining, and fell upon the bed.

At first there rumbled his snores. These gave place to confused and incoherent mutterings and creakings of the bed as he tossed upon it. In her great chair sat his wife, Marie, coldly staring.

Red marks left from Pierre's horny fingers showed in the flesh of her wrists as multiple-dimpled hands rested on the chair arms. She wore a soft calico blouse with half sleeves in deference to the heat of the day. Her forearms showed smooth and softly brunette and beautiful in an unwieldy way.

The woman, however, was by no means assaying her few remaining attractions. Nor was she at this moment remembering the blow that Pierre had dealt her. She had come up in a rough school, a sphere devoid of graces. And as for romance, pish and tush for that! Memories of days of her beauty, when Pierre had been a husband lover, she had long since buried without bitterness, a final rite that is possible for the practical type of mind.

Beauty? She had possessed it; it was gone, buried in lard. *Pouf!* Why light the candles of mourning? *Eh, non,* save the tallow!

Such was the philosophy of Marie Lacour. It was the stony philosophy of middle-aged women of the north.

Across her round face drifted a shadow in odd contrast to the outer sunlight. She stared with eyes once large and limpid and lovely, dulled for years with physical torpor enforced, but terrible in this moment because they blazed with a great, still wrath.

It was of her Lares and Penates she was thinking, her individual world in the Canadian forests, threatened by the worthlessness of Pierre, her husband.

From the bedroom came a hoarse groan and a blistering curse. Marie may have looked like a heathen goddess, but she now attested her Christian faith. Phlegmatically she made the sign of the cross. Her faith was further attested by the beads about her creased neck. That throat, when the good *père* had married her to Pierre at La Cha Claire twenty years before, had been like Annie Laurie's of Burns's braes.

She touched a bell at her elbow. A maid came running up the stairs. *Madame's* increasing weight, a misfortune summoned by no greediness, as she had been a glutton only for work, had not affected her capable brain. Directing her *ménage* from her chair, it was as well controlled as ever. But

with her affliction Pierre had withdrawn from her sway, and it was he who owned title to the establishment, formerly prosperous, that his dissipated course was endangering.

Marie, helpless in the chair, where she had to stay most of her time, was obliged to view the ruin of prospects she had done more than her husband to upbuild.

Madame nodded toward the bedroom. "Call ze doctaire," she ordered laconically. The round-eyed maid, understanding, obeyed.

To obey that voice was instinctive—for all persons than Pierre. Out of the depths of her it rolled; throbbing, powerfully soft, rumbling like an organ note. It was the throaty contralto of her youth deepened with increasing flesh into a feminine *basso profundo*. It held alike austerities of peace and a deeper counter tone, the underlying menace of war.

Then she sat somberly in silence and waited for the doctor to come.

"*Sacré! Liaison de stripes!* Ah-h, murdaire! Damn! *Dieu!* Ze beast, she crawl, she crush me, Pierre! All tam aroun' me she tweest, she squeeze, damn heem! Oh-h, wheesky, wheesky!"

Pierre finished strong on a high C, like a would-be Caruso in a madhouse. A modern Laocoon—to whom, however, the good God had given no sons—he was enjoying a writhing orgy with sundry imagined serpents, inveigled by alcohol. In the room with him, trying to hold him upon the bed, was the good doctor, Emile Bustanet.

The lurid sparks within Marie's amber eyes deepened to sullen flame. Her lips, that had been lovely in youth with Cupid's own curves, pouted a little more petulantly.

Wedge in her chair she brooded while the adjacent uproar continued. It had been three years since she had been forced to remain mostly in that chair. Pierre had taken the bit in his teeth more and more. Becoming more drunken alike with seized authority and with alcohol, this was the third attack of delirium tremens he had suffered in a year.

Against his mismanagement the management of Marie was powerless. The inn was being avoided by all others than the riff-

raff of the rich lumber region. Their reserve of money was dwindling, and chaos impended.

Drink had brought out Pierre's worst traits, that had lain latent in the years when Marie was at the helm. Bully, braggart, seeker of quarrels, he repelled custom that once he sought. He spent most of his time in his barroom. The lusty lumberjacks, while afraid of no man even when as strong as Pierre, preferred to fight among themselves at resorts whose proprietor would not insist on participating.

She had been a fool, Marie often grimly reflected in these later days, ever to consent to his having the undisputed title to the place. She had been an imbecile to so let things drift from the beginning. Now, helpless, she must sit and watch him swill down his gullet the patrimony that, in the beginning, he, too, had worked hard with her to win!

Uprose again in the bedroom Pierre's lamentations, and the voice of the doctor remonstrating with him. Pierre howled, calling upon all hell to witness with him the serpents, centipedes and wriggling soft shell crabs within those four walls.

Marie's brooding gaze drooped downward, resting abstractedly upon the rings left about her wrists by Pierre's hard fingers three hours before. Red at first, they were now purpled. But she was not thinking of them.

She was thinking of the dwindling prospects, the place Pierre was fairly guzzling. And she, who could save it, was helpless. But for this fat of a pig!

Her gaze wandered with a certain apathetic resentment over her proportions. Never before had she troubled overmuch to resent them. Whatever came in life was to be borne with patient philosophy.

But the full spirit of revolt was born at last; the fierce revolt of downtrodden woman that has no counterpart in the elements of man. In Marie's soul, resurrected by the curse of present circumstances, leaped again the old aggressiveness that had once dominated Pierre and directed him toward success.

The spectacle of the establishment, the solids which enclosed them being trans-

mutated to liquids, roused in her a passionate resentment. It should not be; it should be changed. But how?

In life one phenomenon begets another. At last the philosophical and ponderous Marie had mentally revolted. Now, even as she glowered down helplessly at the stolid bulk wedged in her chair, there winged to her, from the mysterious occult clearing house of problems, the answer.

She lifted her eyes. In them was another light, brighter than the lurid fire which had glowed in them before, but calmer.

Out of sudden inner turmoil had come inspiration.

At last, after these years of enforced passivity, Marie Lacour knew what she would do.

Her gaze, grown vengeful again, sought the closed bedroom door.

At this moment it opened and closed again. A man staggered weakly into the center of the sitting-room and stared despairingly at Mme. Lacour.

He was the good doctaire, Emile Bustanet. He was whiskered, winded and whinnying. Almost he sobbed his message, flinging wearied hands to heaven. His coat was off; his collar was torn away; his shirt was in shreds and soaked with sweat.

"*Mère de Dieu!*" he squealed. "*Madame*, I can do nossing weeth him! He is one *grande diable!* Witness me, who am fit for ze rag shop! I will to leave heem die, damn him, pardon, *madame!*"

Marie spoke in that voice that was deep, like mystic tides.

"He will not die. Mooch that he says and does within, eet is of—what you call—ze bluff."

"Zat," confessed the little, black-eyed man, "I know. But what can I do, eh?"

Stolidly she sat and regarded him. For the first time he noticed the new calm light in her eyes; the light of purpose, of power. But she gave him no time to marvel regarding it.

"You," she intoned, like a pipe organ at vespers, "can do nossing, *mon ami*. I can do mooch."

"*You?*" he gasped, staring at the flaccid bulk of her.

"*Oui!*" she rumbled. "I, Marie!"

She placed pudgy palms upon the arms of her chair and pushed upward. The big chair groaned as she gained her feet, that were covered with soft white slippers. She was still able to walk a little.

Mechanically the doctor stepped aside, as if a steam roller were advancing. His incredulous gaze remained glued upon her. What could she do where he had failed? This mountainous woman, grown so heavy that it was hard for her to raise a hand, grown so weak with enforced inactivity that a fork was likely to drop from her nerveless fingers?

Walking toward him she imparted the majestic suggestion of a man-of-war sailing into port. She was six feet tall, but two inches shorter than Pierre, who had begun again to wail and to thresh inside the bedroom. Twenty years previously it had been said of them that never had Canada contained so splendid a couple. They had seemed an idealized reversion to a giant, upstanding, primal type of humanity.

In the enormous figure in zebraed calico, slowly shuffling with pachydermic directness across the room, there was an unmistakable colossal attractiveness. Marie's flesh was firm rather than flabby. When standing, because of her height, the effect of grossness was perceptibly lessened.

The doctor, turning, watched her enter the room. The door closed behind her. A key clicked in the lock.

He heard her rumbling accents. The words were indistinguishable because of the verbal fuss Pierre was making. Then she appeared to gain his wandering attention.

She uttered more low words that the listening doctor could not catch. Then Bustanet's blood ran cold. From the man in the bed came suddenly queer cries, piteous groans, uncouth sounds of agony.

Bustanet ran at the door, beating upon it. "Assistance!" he yelled. "She is keeling him!"

As men and maids came running upstairs to the sitting-room, came the calm, deep voice of Marie, admonishing the physician.

"Doctaire! Shut your damn mouth! I am boss here, and I have keeled no one!"

Bustanet, and the others with him, yielded to that voice of quiet authority, as all except Pierre had done through the years. They gaped toward the closed door, divining that somehow the braggart and bully had come again under the control of his chair-ridden wife.

The glorious deep voice, Marie's sole remaining beauty, placidly rumbled again. Now the words were addressed to Pierre.

"An' you will make over title to the inn to me, dees day?"

Unaccustomedly small came the responsive voice of Pierre:

"*Oui, Marie!*"

"An' you weel work for me, as I say, Pierre? For, ba God, eef you do not, I, Marie, weel smash you!"

Hurriedly came the reply, rippling with impetuous eagerness:

"*Oui, oui, Marie!*"

A key clicked. A door opened, yielding Dr. Bustanet a passing glimpse of two scared eyes of Pierre, huddled in bed. He was staring at the wife who had somehow conquered him.

The door closed. The giantess stared coldly at Bustanet. "Doctaire," she imparted, "he is cured. Go home!"

"Lazies," she asked of the others, "why stand you an' stare? Get you to ze work for which you are paid!"

Physician, maids and men departed, speculating, marveling.

Marie sank heavily into the seat of the mighty. She sat staring, planning, dreaming anew. Again there was a future!

Swung the cycles of the seasons till sleighbells rang in the new year of 1918. Axes swung a plenty in the dense forests surrounding Albereque. Where, three years before, had been groups of flannel-shirted, felt-booted woodsmen, was now a small army of them. For Canadian timber tracts were also doing their bit to yield their meed for shipping needs.

In the Albereque Inn was such prosperity as it had never known, and now unmarred by disorder.

The pendulum that had before 1914 swung toward war now remained in the peace zone. Marië Lacour, growing always

fatter, was wholly mistress of all she surveyed.

She had caused her chair to be taken down-stairs into the barroom. From this throne of oak and iron she issued edicts. Nor was ever even Catherine the Great more scrupulously obeyed.

The underlings took their cue from Pierre, once the terrible, now the terrorized. Why? Nobody knew.

He was now capable factotum for his wife, who owned full title to the inn. Some time its bravo, he was now its bouncer. He was the muscle for Marie, who no longer walked even a little. He was the eager instrument of her will; he was her rubber stamp.

Early she made it known that the barroom of the Albereque Inn was a place of order. Lusty lumberjacks might drink themselves therein into a spirit of fighting. But they had to go outside to fight. Marie was not going to have the place mussed up with them!

Usually an eloquent look from her would be sufficient to send them bashfully from the door to whang one another's features in the rambling street outside. If this were not enough, the look was transferred to Pierre. He would leap like a knight, at the behest of his lady. Immediately the outer landscape would be clogged with sprawling members of the contentious and ungodly.

Ere long the Albereque Inn was the best paying establishment in that part of Quebec, and the most orderly.

Marie treated Pierre better than he had treated her, when he was lord. He dressed well; he smoked; he drank—beer. He received the benefits of spiritual grace, for Marie required him to attend mass each Sunday.

But he was ruled by fear of her; fear that showed in the swift gleam of his eyes when she summoned him, and in cringing when she gave him a baleful look from her eyes.

What magic had transformed him, on that August day in 1914, from a ramping mastodon to a mild but mighty mouse? Nobody knew, nor did any man venture to ask Pierre.

His fists were hard, and he was afraid of no man, but only of a woman. Also, in the ethics of the northland the affairs of a man and his wife were nobody's damn business. In such matters the logic of the north is sufficiently succinct and sound.

So Pierre, a constructive force when directed by Marie's brain, continued to quail and to fear, and to make dollars for Marie. And nobody knew why.

While the stupendous Marie continued to sit helpless in the barroom and to silently dream dreams and see visions. And nobody knew what.

Now with the bleak dawn of the new year in the forest hedging Albereque were noises proclaiming the winter activity of man. Drivers hallooed; horses plunged through the snow hauling the logs to the river bank to await the spring freshets. Rang the knell of steel; choppers jumped aside as the trees came crashing down. Oaths, songs, harsh commands combined to make an uproar.

This section of woodland was owned by Bill MacCool. Two hundred lumberjacks, mostly from Ontario just across the line, were at work on it. It adjoined the holding of Jacques Montrois, which was in equal commotion, and was manned chiefly by French Canadians.

In the MacCool tract, near the Montrois line, was working a squat giant of a man. He was gloriously and vitally alive, though only dimly aware of it.

He was Swedish, and he responded finally to the name of Axel Linstruth. For you had usually to speak at least twice to gain his attention.

However, he was one of MacCool's most valuable men. He had not need for wireless thinking. He did his work by instinct.

This was implanted in him because he was a son of generations of lumberjacks. He had come from Sweden, that cradle of woodsmen. He was one of those stalwart Scandinavians who, lashing felled trees in rafts, and wielding long sweeps with uncanny skill, go thundering down mad rivers bursting with spring floods, whirling unscathed through boiling rapids, coming triumphant to port at last.

Like an automaton Axel wielded his ax alone. His swinging partner had gone to the camp, a mile away, in response to a summons by the boss.

With tireless rhythm the steel bit home. The odorous bouquet of the sap tinged the frosty air. Without respite Axel swung with an even steadiness of leisure. Every muscle was coordinated, from the plunging arc of the stroke, clean to the parting "kick" that drove the blade home, and the easy wrench which recoiled the ax over his shoulder, ready for the next stroke.

Though it was twenty degrees below zero, Axel wore no coat, and the sleeves of his flannel shirt were uprolled. They exposed flesh as red as the cloth, yet it would have been found warm to the touch. A pair of shapeless breeches, rent in spots and exposing gray woolen underwear, and tucked into gray felt boots, completed an elementary *ensemble*.

Sweat dripped from the point of his chin that was rough with blond beard. His flannel collar was unbuttoned. His deep, hairy chest rose and fell with peaceful breaths, and slow. Even his red ears were uncovered. The hood of his red and black cap remained folded inside the crown.

The trunk of the tall pine trembled and crashed to death in the snow.

Axel straightened to his five-and-six, dashing the sweat from his brow. That brow was unlined or unwrinkled by any trace of thought.

Millionaires grow soft in the head worrying about the hardening of their arteries. Axel's arteries were pumps forcing through his system a rich red flood of phenomenal health. But his brain was not developed enough to appreciate this health. Therefore, to all humanity is denied the fullest measure of joy, seek as it will millionaire or mutt.

Axel did not know enough to be glad, or sad. He was a sort of Mohammed's coffin, floating gravely between earth and sky in a stratum of peace. Yet his only wistful desire, aside from eating, sleeping, and working, was for something of which he had not spoken since coming to the camp two months before.

However, in this moment Axel was not

thinking of this, nor of anything. He stood by the fallen pine, dashing the beads of sweat from the concrete door of his mind.

Past the reaches of snow-crowned forest gazed this guy with no hills or valleys in his mind, but only a yawning pit. He saw no snow-crowned forest. He saw—nothing.

Presently would come the hour of dinner, and he would observe its summons. But not through conscious thought; only because instinct told him he was hungry.

Pop-eyed, prehistoric, imperturbable—almost impossible—stood Axel upon sturdy and elliptical legs. He had the seeming of a patient Atlas, whose broad shoulders could support a world. He was squat, wide, terrible, like a gorilla. Rock-hard, he weighed easily two hundred pounds.

Suddenly, from the direction of the Montrois tract next MacCool's, sounded a savage commotion. It was at least three seconds before Axel noticed it. Then he turned his head toward the sound.

Now there came the only sign by which one could tell that Axel was thinking.

It was not by any horizontal line across his forehead, nor did any creases of concentration appear between his thick blond brows. No, it was by neither of these signs that one could tell Axel was thinking. It was one that, being far less common than these, was that much more weird.

Among other debatable attractions, he possessed a pair of mild, blue eyes.

As he turned his head toward the Montrois tract and the commotion, his eyes popped.

He dropped his ax by the fallen pine. Like a lumbering bear he shambled through the drifted snow in the direction of those wild and uncouth sounds.

Came to his red and stolid ears the thud of knotted flash on flesh, the rip of fervid curses in two languages, all the divine deviltry dear to the hearts of elemental men.

Apathetically stalked Axel to the scene of the newest of many fierce brawls.

A few hundred yards farther on the Three Buccaneers were—in the vernacular—whaling the whey out of five French Canadians.

The *voyageurs* of Jacques Montrois's gang were at constant odds with the men

of Bill MacCool. For this the old enmity between the Provinces of Ontario and Quebec was responsible. Between Canadians of English extraction and those of French, so far as the elemental types are concerned, there is like to be the bond of brotherly blows.

So often bosses of both gangs, who chanced to be near the line, hastened, swearing at this interruption to work, to disentangle writhing piles of men, and to find either *voyageurs* or Ontario men underneath.

But when the Three Buccaneers, of MacCool's gang, were engaged in one of these fistic orgies, against whatever odds, it was always the "Frenchies" who were hampered. And the fame of that trio of bruisers, for two years now known as MacCool's mightiest men, either for work or fight, had spread widely through the Canadian north.

Vigor, vim and versatility—those three v's essential to lumberjacking and scrapping in the wilds, were theirs. It had been said of them that they never had to lick the same guys twice, for the recipients were perfectly satisfied with the first performance. Also, they delighted in improvisation. They had the genius's true horror of triteness. They always licked their victims a brand-new way.

As Axel—who standing by his pine, had recognized the brawling voices of the Three Buccaneers—ambled into the clearing alongside the Montrois line, the quintet of French Canadians were feeling the sting of Buccaneer victory.

The trio of Ontario men had landed hard and often, and had the situation well in hand.

In order these three champions were Phil Beach from Clemmins, Al Gonder from North Harbor, and Tommy Sayres from Lisnard. All were busy, and working with commendable zeal.

The pug-faced Sayres, the lower half of whose visage in this moment resembled a Boston bull terrier's, had a pair of the cursing *voyageurs* by the backs of their unshorn necks. He was driving their skulls together till they clanged like a pair of dumb bells.

Red-faced, hook-nosed Al Gonder, who was short, thick and thin-tempered, was sitting astride the fallen herculean leader of the Frenchies, a giant who had accepted the "dare" of the Buccaneers, and led his men across the line to combat.

Employing the leader's blue-black beard as a handle, Gonder was industriously banging his dazzled cone upon the fallen trunk of a soft maple tree.

Axel, the Swede, stood with legs akimbo, at the edge of the clearing. Blank-faced, dull-eyed and silent, he glanced at Sayres and Gonder, toiling away, with fervent Ontario swearing, at their tasks.

Then his sleepy and impersonal gaze, which noted apathetically that two of the Buccaneers were accounting for three Frenchies, wandered to the third Ontario slammer, leader of the trio and the most formidable of these terrors of the woods.

He was Phil Beach, from Clemmins. It was said of him that, while residing there, he had kept the hospital of that northern metropolis reasonably well filled.

He was long geared, lanky and lantern jawed. He packed the punch of a trip-hammer motored by Jersey lightning.

He had the head of the fourth enemy under an armpit. With the free fist he was methodically redrafting his map. The fifth foe, picking himself out of the snow wherein Beach had somehow thrown him in the moment before Axel arrived to look on, was picking himself up to charge anew upon the Ontario terror.

Axel, joining placid hands in front of him, dropped upon his hunkers and watched with lack-luster eyes the brief drama which followed.

Upon Phil Beach charged the fifth Frenchy. Without dropping the man who was in chancery, warily Beach estimated distance from the corner of a gray eye that was colder than the weather. Up and out plunged his left leg, in a kick like a mule's.

His heel landed in the chest of the advancing foe. Backward and down went the Frenchy, gasping. Not till then did Beach drop the man whose features he was reassembling.

The fight was over. The leader whose skull Gonder had been tapping against the

fallen tree trunk was allowed to rise. Crawling to his feet he walked dizzily toward his own line, followed by the damaged faithful. The Buccaneers, unmarked, stood at ease and watched them go.

"You *will* try to climb us, will ye?" bawled Beach after them, with some picturesque though unprintable epithets. "Maybe it 'll dent yer chilled steel after a while that the only thing you could climb would be trees! Get t' holy sassafras hell out o' here, y' yella-livered *sapree* suckers! *Hooraw!*"

Grinning like primordial apes, the Three Buccaneers turned to one another as the last of their recent antagonists skulked into the stark and snow-crowned recesses of the Montrois tract. As they had often done for two years, since they had chanced to come together in Bill MacCool's gang and, joining forces in the first wrangle, had earned their buccaneering title, they began to toss verbal bouquets to themselves and to one another.

"D'ju see the spinach I drewed?" inquired the shorter and uglier Al Gonder, flourishing a pawful of blue-black whiskers which he had torn from the chin of the leader of the Montrois gang. "All I need now is a go-t'-hell apron an' high-heeled slippers t' be the parlor maid in a music comedy! I got the feather duster!"

"D'je see me bangin' the beans t'gether of my pair?" boasted the bull-faced Sayres. "I reminded myself of the cymbals, when I was end man in the home minstrels at Liscard that time!"

"Pleasant pickles!" boomed the ring-leader, Phil Beach, of brawn and resource. "D'jah see th' double job I done? Notice that kick? Guess I wouldn't need no lessons from a mule! An' say, d'jah see me nestlin' that drumface under my wing, like a rooster would a orphan owl? Take it from me, pards, to-morra he'll walk backwards, I shifted his face to hind side before!"

Thus communing, lost in vapors of self praise, they walked together toward where Axel Linstruth was squatting, dully regarding them. Nor, with eyes fixed upon one another as they continued to jabber of their conquest, did they see him at all. Awk-

wardly he rolled out of the way into the snow as they tramped over the spot into the woods, with man's size chucklings and roarings.

A clear, sharp, discordant summons split the wintry forest silence. It proceeded from the throat of the whistle over the cook house of the MacCool camp.

"Dinner!" yowled Beach, and the Three Buccaneers quickened their pace, swinging triumphantly down the stumpy slope that lay in the direction of the hut of physical refreshment.

After them, at slower pace, wandered Axel, blank of face, and with the serenity indigenous to a block of wood.

But the shrewd observer could have told that he was thinking again. His eyes had popped.

Albereque, Quebec, half-way from New York to the north pole as the toe hies, had few social diversions; such as they were, however, were by no means dry ones. And, because of the working requirements of the days the dampness usually intensified the aura of the evenings.

Lately the celebrants had been fairly well confined to the flannel-shirted toilers of the MacCool tract. The Frenchies from the Montrois holding had been thrashed that winter till they were well cowed, and usually repaired to resorts at the next camp, a mile down the river.

At supper in the camp that night the Three Buccaneers had bragged much of their victory over the five Frenchies in the morning, and received the humble admiration of their comrades. They felt the need of celebrating.

Beach, Sayres, and Gonder, the Buccaneers whom the French-Canadians had come to fear like horny-handed death, entered the barroom of the Albereque Inn a little while after supper.

Pierre Lacour was absent, having gone somewhere upon an errand for Marie. She, unwieldy empress of her domain, sat enthroned upon her broad strong chair by the wall, near the end of the bar.

From this chair the arms had for several months now been absent. Time had brought more poundage to Marie Lacour.

She now weighed a trifle less than six hundred.

It chanced that when Beach, with Sayres and Gonder following, strode into the bar-room of the inn, fronting the wood were only a half dozen "*Canadiens*." The usual group of Ontario men was not there.

What were six such against three bucks, swelling with the glow of victory over the most formidable of the Montrois gangs?

Threateningly there balled Beach's two great hands as the six men, who stood jabbering while the slim little bartender, Baptiste Croix, stood waiting for a belated order, looked about at the feared trio with visible quailing.

Then the Ontario man espied Marie, enormous in her chair, looking at him stolidly, reading his thought. That elephantine Marie, who had been once such a Marie as she of whom the beloved Canadian poet had sung:

"Oh, the girl Marie, she is *tres jolie*,
Jompin' around lak de summer bee!"

Years had gone since Marie "jumped." But the look of her, of conscious power and authority conferred by her clear brain, recalled to the law-abiding consciousness of Phil Beach that, since Marie mysteriously took over the title to the inn from Pierre, it had been the abode of order.

He turned to her. "*Madame*, d'ye want these rubbishers here?" Rumbled, as from a cavern, her deep, throbbing voice.

"I care not. They buy but leetle. But none of ze fighting weel I have."

"*Bien!*" nodded Phil Beach, and addressed the visibly quailing *Canadiens*.

"You heard the lady!" he roared in a terrible voice. "*Sapree maudit! Baptême!* Beat it, bums! Or shall us three go out an' beat up you six outside, maybe?"

The sextet left in a monstrous hurry. Beach looked at his two companions. The chests of all three men, the Three Buccaneers, champion fighters of the Albereque woods, swelled in unison at this scurrying tribute just given by the Frenchies to their physical powers.

Leader Al grinned at the mountainous Marie.

"*Eh, madame*, quiet an' order you shall

have, I promise you. An' you shall lose nothin' for shooing the refuse away. Three real spenders, an' noble drinking' men, are here, an' more Ontario men will blow in at any time to swell the circle."

He turned to the bar. "Ma leetle Batees'e, make it a row of three of those alc' straights, an' be sure you keep the stoppers out o' the bottles. *Vive* the law an' order! *Vive madame!* *Vive* that peace she likes, you bet yeh!"

The door opened and closed.

Raising his glass for the first round, Beach turned his head, as did the other two Buccaneers.

Grins split their homely but now amiable faces at sight of this comparative newcomer in MacCool's camp, the mild and awkward being who hobnobbed mostly with himself, and who had often listened dully with others to the Buccaneers' tales of daring. A queer, silent, blank chap, this blond, squat, Scandinavian giant, but he was welcome. Any man of MacCool's was welcome at this moment.

There stood Axel Linstruth — and his eyes popped.

"Hello, Axel!" roared Phil Beach. "How de do? How are you? Step up an' start a skinful! What yeh havin', old Swede?"

All three of his camp mates had turned now, grinning at the squat giant. Upon him was fixed, too, the basilisk gaze of the monstrous Marie Lacour. Behind the dripping wood stood Baptiste, inquiringly awaiting his answer.

No shadow of rancor lurked in Axel's mild blue eyes. No hardness underlay the pleasant voice, dreamily replying to Beach's cordial invitation in words that transfixed the three Buccaneers.

"Ay ban not trink now. Ay ban lick you all, first!"

And he started in to do it.

It was three minutes later. Within that barroom, now dismantled and shorn of everything movable, lightnings had tangoed and thunders had crashed. Chaos had connected. Peace and order had fled screaming, down the wind.

Over by a section of the wrecked bar

lay two men, just jerking awake from terrific swings to the jaws. They were Tommy Sayres and Ontario Al Gonder.

At the other end of the cycloned room, while the scared bartender peeked over the intact edge of the bar, Axel was engaged with M. P. Beach, the most formidable member of the trio of Buccaneers. But Beach did not know in this moment that he was formidable.

Axel, laughing pleasantly, primordially, horribly, deep in his red throat, was using him for what looked to be a sort of game of handball for viking gods.

While, watching with terrible eyes this scene, the first of its kind that had occurred in this room since she assumed title to the inn, sat helpless in her chair Marie Lacour, more physically helpless now than in that moment, at the outbreak of war four years previously, when in the sanctity of his sleeping room she had somehow subdued Pierre, her husband.

Not a word had escaped her pouting lips since the orgy began. She had only continued to watch the mighty, unleashed Axel, and her big, liver-colored eyes were awful.

Finally tiring of his sport as the other busted bucks came dizzily to their feet, Axel caught Beach in mid air, playfully tossed him at them about ten feet away, and knocked them down again like nine-pins.

With the fling his foot slipped in a wet spot on the floor. Up went his heels and down he came on the broad of his back close alongside the great chair in which Marie sat enthroned; the chair that had been for some months now without arms, for the accommodation of its occupant's increasing width.

Surprised by his mishap, Axel's pop eyes glanced upward. They remained, held as if in hypnosis in the grip of two other pop eyes, that for all their rotundity held the look of a lady tiger's.

The street door opened. Pierre Lacour, returned from his errand, had heard the din and came running to see. He burst open the door to view confusion that was like old times.

But for this he had no thought. His

horrified gaze was fixed upon the recumbent Axel, lying on the broad of his back by the chair of Mme. Lacour, staring up at her as if in hypnosis.

Toward the Swede rushed the Frenchy, staring wildly, paling to the roots of his shoe-brush mustache.

"*M'sieu'!*" he screamed as the three whipped Buccaneers together scrambled to their feet, "*roll ovaire! Queeck. Mon Dieu, she weel get you—*"

It was too late. With a pant and a grunt Mme. Lacour managed to hurl herself sideways from her armless chair.

Upon the defenseless torso of Axel, the fighting Scandinavian — destined as had been Pierre to a Waterloo at the bulk of a woman — came swishing and thundering down nearly six hundred pounds of sweet Marie.

And enthroned now upon Axel rather than upon a chair, sat Mme. Lacour with hands crossing placidly in her lap.

Pop eyes stared down into pop eyes that popped again as Axel strove to find breath to yell. His effort was futile. He merely exhaled; inhalations were impossible.

But his wavering consciousness took cognizance of one big fact, that he now realized fully for the first time.

Glaring down into his eyes *madame* spoke for the first time since he had started his roughhouse. Deep was her voice; containing the very deeps of peace, and underlying that the dread counter tones of war.

"*M'sieu' l' Fool, I weel have peace in dees place!*"

And for Axel the war of life would have been lost in peace eternal had it not been for the intervention of Pierre, the reason for whose quelling was now made known to the world.

Frantically he whirled to the bucks. "My fran's! *Maudit!* She will keel him; she near keeled me, an' now she weigh wan, two hunder more! She crack hees ribs; she bus' hees lung! *Dieu!* do I not know, Pierre?"

"Fran's, help me to pull her off heem! She can't he'p himse'f; she ees too fat! Ba gosh, he weel die an' dey weel keel her

for *murdaire!* Ba cripe, *petite, ma leetle Marie!*"

Pierre was sobbing now, leaping maniacally up and down before his stolid, voiceless spouse, who as he said, could not assist herself. While underneath her Axel's pop eyes grew popper, his red face turned blue, making with the whites of his eyes a patriotic ensemble for a peace celebration, and his inhalation was almost ended.

At this affecting tableau gazed the demoralized Buccaneers, then at one another.

"Shall we leave him die?" inquired Gonder, bashfully arranging the fragments of his torn shirt, as there was a lady present.

"Naw," disgustedly objected Sayres, "he's too iggorunt to die!"

"Besides," put in Beach from Ontario brightly, "it wouldn't be decent to a lady. They mout hang her for murder, if they could weave the rope!"

So together the three Samaritans turned to the task of derricking implored by the weeping Pierre, to whom the old love for Marie had returned in overflowing measure since she had sat upon him on that fateful August day in 1914.

Axel imbibed that drink he had deferred. But he didn't know it. Choking, strangling, coughing, he winked awake. He inhaled a great breath of air into collapsed lungs. Instinctively his big hands passed over ribs that were sore but intact. Only

whalebone and steel could have withstood that shock. For, as has been told, Marie's flesh was not flabby but solid.

His blond head was held upon the knee of the tattered Beach. Phil and Tommy and Al looked down upon him, who had conquered all of them together and had not even sweated with the exercise, with mingled emotions that did not include anger. Sorrow, curiosity, admiration; these vied.

"You done a' wonderful job, Axel," acknowledged Beach. "But why the hell d'ju lick us who was yer friends? An' belonged to yer own gang?"

Axel's pop eyes surveyed them, and Pierre behind them. They shifted to Marie, regnant and silent in her chair. In them flared anew that fear which had once entered the orbs of Pierre, not to depart. He shivered.

His popping gaze returned to the lantern visage of leader Phil Beach. He spoke gropingly, weakly, and his words definitely broadened the understanding of that trio who had been boastful and vainglorious. Swung in resignation three mental pendulums toward the meek arc of peace.

And while he spoke, in new-found timidity and quailing did the round eyes of Axel seek the enigmatic and illimitable face of Marie Lacour.

"Ay ban watch you t'ree fight. You ban look slow to me. *Ay tank Ay ban show you how to fight!*"

A CAROL

SPIRIT of the mad, glad wind,
 Spirit of the river's flow,
 Spirit of the waving grass,
 Where the black-eyed Susans grow;
 Soul of little streams that race
 Foamy, frolicsome, and bright,
 Over glistening, shell-strewn sands
 Where the sun-gleams save their light—

You've been prisoned and set free
 In this slender, calm-browed child.
 To her grave eyes you've been wooed,
 By her coaxing lips beguiled.
 Tender sometimes, wilful, gay—
 Daughter of the out-of-doors;
 Fashioned of the same blithe stuff
 As the bird that broods and soars.

Marguerite Meade Wurzburg.

Texas Fever

by Charles V. Barney

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

THE death of his uncle, who never liked him, left Frederick Pope the plantation and slaves of the old place near Columbus, Mississippi. Determined to free the slaves and seek adventure in the boundless West of the period—1835—he took up with the offer of Colonel Carrington, whom he met by chance, to join an expedition about setting out for Texas. Arrived in Natchez, he saved from insult a young girl whom he encountered in a resort evidently strange to her—a bar in the lower town. As a matter of fact, Maria Anna Bascom, an heiress, had dashed in there as a refuge from a thief who had snatched her necklace after she had madly rushed away from her guardian's home on discovering that he—Mr. Sims—was in league with one Paul de Cardac to despoil her of her money. Loving De Cardac with all her heart, it was only the evidence of her own ears that convinced her that the fellow was marrying her for her money. But when Fred asked her why she had entered such a place as the Merchants' and Farmers' Bar, she demanded what right he had to question her, and requested that he let go her arm.

CHAPTER V.

CONFIDENCES.

MARIA ANNA started to walk rapidly down the dark street. Fred was at once beside her.

"Don't be silly," he said. "I'm sorry if I have hurt your feelings, but you must admit—"

"I admit nothing," she snapped.

"I must see you home in safety. It is late. Where is your home?"

Again she remembered everything.

"I have no home," she said miserably, like a weary, helpless child.

"Where shall I take you, then? You can't go wandering about like this alone."

"No, I suppose not. Oh, I don't know what to do.

The child was still uppermost. She seemed about to confide all her troubles to him. Suddenly, changing her mind, she asked: "Where would you take me, sir?"

He made no response.

Maria Anna continued: "You have me on your hands, you see, so what are you going to do about it?"

She was partly serious, partly cajoling, and partly half crazed. She was not at all sure of what she was saying.

Again there was no response. Fred had possessed himself of her arm, and they had been walking slowly but steadily down the street. They now found themselves nearing the edge of town, close to the river bank.

She drew herself away and peered up at him through the darkness.

"Who are you? What are you, any way? I think I have a right to question as well as you."

"I am Frederick Pope," he replied promptly. "And I am now on my way to Texas, where I intend to settle."

Inadvertently her hand flew to her breast, whence came the sound of rattling paper. It was the hand-bill of the Texas Empresarios that she had been reading just before she made that fatal trip down-stairs. Why she had folded it up and tucked it in her bosom she did not know.

The young man either did not notice or did not heed her gesture, but he continued: "We are a big party, mostly men, but a

This story began in *The Argosy* for March 8.

few women. We are encamped about a mile farther on, over there," and he pointed. "I think you can see the light of our camp-fires. Yes, there they are. To-morrow morning early we cross the river."

His tone was almost wistful in its longing for the land of the unknown—the home of adventure.

She caught the tone, and was thrilled by it. Something of the same spirit that animated him entered her.

Perhaps some wild, primeval strain in her blood was awakened. She did not know what it was that tingled within her, making her restless and full of longing to wander, to explore, to endure hardships, to suffer, to be happy—to live!

Her eyes rested on the low, flat strip of land where in the distance several fires burned.

"Why can't I go there?" she asked.

"I suppose I could take you, but—"

"What is the matter?" she asked sharply, as he hesitated.

He felt strongly impelled to tell her that it would be difficult to explain his appearance at this hour of the night with a beautiful young woman, who insisted she had no home, whose name he did not know, a woman who was dressed in a dirty, blood-spotted, white low-necked dress. He strove to find the right words.

Immediately Maria Anna interposed:

"Why do we stand here and wait? Surely one of the women will let me have a corner of her wagon? I might even sleep outside. It would be more fun."

She was already childishly enthusiastic about the contemplated frolic, as it seemed to her.

"But—well, to-morrow it will be daylight, and then you—" Fred began.

"You mean," she spoke slowly and coldly—"you mean that to-morrow I can shift for myself. Answer—be quick about it—that's what you mean—yes?"

"I don't think I should have said it that way—" Fred began.

She again interrupted:

"Neither to-morrow, nor the next day, nor the day after that, will you be bothered with me. I promise you that much."

She was the woman now, full grown and sure of herself.

"I am sorry"—he found himself again apologizing, and he was not in the habit of doing it, either—"I'm sorry. Come, I will take you."

"It makes little difference to me whether you do or not. I intend to go anyway," she spoke haughtily and, disregarding the arm he offered her, she strode forward toward the lights.

The distance was traversed in silence. Maria Anna walked with her head held high and thought her own miserable thoughts.

The man guided her steps and pondered deeply, but his ponderings seemed to get him nowhere.

Arrived at the encampment, Frederick left the girl beside the first fire, which happened to be deserted, and, asking her to await his return, went forward to where he saw several men stretched out for the night. The entire camp was quiet, except for the whining of a dog who was tied up beneath one of the wagons.

Frederick looked about, uncertain what to do, then he espied a figure watching him from the shadows. He went forward, and found it to be Colonel Carrington.

"Well, my boy," the old gentleman began, "you are late."

Fred replied by asking where he could find the colonel's wife.

"Just gone into her tent, there," and the colonel pointed.

"May I speak to her? It's important."

The colonel was surprised, but asked no questions.

"Of course you may speak to her. Go right in."

"She may be asleep?"

"No; she just left me a second ago."

Fred went to the entrance of the tent.

"May I come in? I want to speak to you."

He felt that he was being importunate, but still he must find a place for the girl to sleep!

"Who's that?"

"Fred Pope."

"Can't it wait till morning?"

"No. I'm sorry. This is important."

"Wait a moment—now—come in."

Fred entered the tent, which was lit by a kerosene lantern hung up so high that it only gave a minimum amount of illumination. Sitting on a rough box was Thetis Carrington, the colonel's wife.

She was a handsome woman of fifty, rather stout and gray, but hale and hearty looking. Good-nature shone from her. She was roughly dressed and rather untidy, but generations of breeding had left decided evidences upon her.

"What is it?" she inquired.

"I found a young woman in town, and she wants to sleep here to-night. I know it sounds strange; it *is* strange. I don't know who she is or anything about her; but she is a lady. She seems to know no one, to have no place to go. I rescued her from a tough lot. She was in a sort of—a—well, there was a fight, and she got a knock on the arm and was put out for a bit. I—"

"Where was all this?"

Fred looked sheepish. "It was—"

Thetis Carrington interrupted him, and he knew that he would always bless her for saving him further explanation.

"Makes no difference where it was. Is the woman badly hurt?"

"No; she's all right now. She's not a woman; she's scarcely more than a girl. She's a sweet sort of a little thing, but she's got a will of her own. Can't you give her a place to stay—look out for her for to-night?"

"Where is she?"

"Waiting outside."

The next question astonished Fred. It was:

"How long have you known her?"

"Never saw or heard of her before an hour ago."

"Cross your heart?"

"Sure." He hated himself for blushing so furiously. "She's all right," he added hurriedly.

"You've said that once before," the colonel's wife remarked, and then lapsed into silence to look intently at Frederick. She was a clever reader of people; but then she had only known this young man for one day. She trusted him instinctively; and he had a good name; besides, her adored hus-

band liked him; still, one could not always tell. And, as she afterward told her husband, Fred Pope was too good-looking not to get himself and probably other people into trouble.

Finally she spoke: "Well, let me see her. Your tale does sound funny—but, well, let me see her."

"Thank you very, very much—"

"Bring her in."

He turned away and, leaving the tent, went in search of his erstwhile companion, whom he found standing where he had left her beside the dying fire.

She had been reading a small piece of paper, perhaps a letter, and as he drew near he saw her drop it into the embers, where it immediately took fire.

Fred caught himself wondering if it were a love-letter, and if so, from whom she had received it. Why did she burn it, and of all times, why now?

The paper had really been the Texas advertisement. She had been reading:

... whose ambition has been thwarted by untoward circumstances; whose spirit, though depressed, is not discouraged; who longs only for some ample fields on which to lay out strength; who does not hanker after society, nor sigh for the vanished illusions of life; who has a fund of resources within himself, and a heart to trust God and his own exertions; who is not physically sensitive to petty inconveniences, but can bear privations and make sacrifices of personal comfort—such a person will do well to settle accounts at home and begin life anew in Texas.

"Begin life anew," she repeated as the paper flashed into flame.

Before Pope had reached her she had made up her mind what she was going to do.

"Come," he said.

"Where?"

"I have spoken to Colonel Carrington's wife about you, and she will fix you up."

"What is she like?" the girl wanted to know as they crossed the space between the fire and the dark tent.

"She's fine; a big, whole-souled sort of a woman."

He lifted the flap of the tent, and, as he stood aside, quickly asked: "What's your name?"

Maria Anna was about to reply, but her eyes had met those of the older woman, and she turned sweetly to him.

"I will tell her that myself," she said, and, dropping the flap between herself and Fred, she added, "Good night, sir."

She took two steps forward and then she stopped short, a shudder ran through her, and she seemed to wilt. The older woman arose and was quickly by her side. One big arm encircled the girl's slender waist and supported her.

Maria Anna attempted to gain control of herself.

"I'm sorry," she apologized. "I'm not going to faint. I—you see, I'm so tired, and everything is so strange. Everybody—I seemed to have forgotten that there were any faces in the world that were sweet and gentle like yours. I—"

"Men are fools," was all that Thetis Carrington responded. Then, as she guided the delicate figure toward a heap of bags, she said: "Sit down." Then, as she placed an arm about the girl's shoulders: "What's the matter with your neck? It's cut—"

"That's from my chain. A horrible man snatched it away—and it was my garnet one with the cross; and I loved it so!"

"There—there!" Thetis seated herself beside the young woman and forced Maria Anna's head down upon her ample breast. "There—there!" she said again.

The girl lay quiet for a few minutes; then she raised herself and, looking the other woman in the eyes, she entreated: "May I sleep here to-night, please?"

"Of course you can, child; of course you can, and don't talk unless you want to."

There was another silence, and during it the older woman looked closely at the younger. She thought that she had never seen greater delicacy and beauty in any face. As she afterward told the colonel, she was like a white hyacinth.

"I'm so tired," the girl sighed at last. "I wish I had a home. I want to go home."

"Why can't you go home?" Mrs. Carrington inquired gently.

The answer came very simply and quietly: "I haven't any home, any more."

The older woman felt her heart melt within her. She was about to speak her sympathy when Maria Anna asked abruptly:

"You are going to Texas, are you not?"

"Yes. Why?"

"I want to go, too. Take me with you?"

The eyes of the speaker looked appealingly at Mrs. Carrington, and the hands lifted themselves in a pathetic little gesture of entreaty.

Thetis Carrington was moved; but always she had been noted for her horse-sense. She demanded:

"Why do you want to go so far away?"

"I want to get away from everything—everybody I ever saw before—I want to begin all over again."

"What is the matter—what have you done, child?"

"That's the funny part—I haven't done anything. But—why can't I go with you to Texas?"

"Perhaps you can. What gave you the notion about going? Have you got the Texas fever?"

"What?"

"The Texas fever—that's what they call this itching to get away to Texas, that has got hold of everybody."

"No, it isn't that; but—" she hesitated, and then resolutely resumed: "You see, I trusted two people, and I loved them both very much; and they have betrayed me, and I don't seem to know just what to do, where to turn."

"So you thought you would turn everything upside down and run away with us to Texas; is that about it?"

Maria Anna smiled, a quick, wistful little smile.

"No, that's not quite the truth. Do you mind if I tell you all about it?"

"Do, if you feel inclined to tell your business."

Then very briefly and convincingly she told her story to the sympathetic Mrs. Carrington; meanwhile the darky, asleep in the far corner of the tent, snored, and the dog, tied up somewhere near by, whined and yapped.

When the tale was ended Thetis took the girl in her arms and hugged her close,

and then she held her from her and announced sagely:

"You are making 'a big mistake when you say you loved that young man. If you did, you can't stop short of doing it like that. I don't think real love is like that at all.

"You may despise a person; you may know a person is a scoundrel and all that, but if you love 'em, you love 'em; and that's all there is to it. After a long time you might get so you didn't care any more, but all at once—no, no!"

Maria Anna interposed:

"But, then, he has deceived me—they had both deceived me so terribly—and I had put all my trust in them."

"Well, that's foolish!" Thetis interrupted. "It doesn't pay to put all your trust in any one thing or person—nothing can stand up against such a strain. They are sure to fail you sooner or later; that is, everybody is, except God; and you know somehow it seems to me that He has sort of got the cards stacked so that He can't fail.

"No matter what He does, it must be right, because nobody knows any better. You simply can't call His hand. But I guess I have scandalized you, haven't I?"

"I don't think I understand—"

"It's just as well that you don't."

"But I like you very much."

"Yes? That's good. Now listen to me. You can stay here to-night; but to-morrow morning early you are to go back to your guardian, get things straightened out; and if you still love your sweetheart, well, who knows but you may marry and live happily ever afterward?"

Maria Anna sprang to her feet; her eyes flashed ominously; her breast heaved, and she cried passionately:

"You, I think, do not understand me. I would kill myself before I would go back to that house again. I mean it. Yes, I mean just that. No, you do not understand!

"You think I am a foolish little girl. You think because I have talked to you as I have, that I am only capable of the sweet, simple feelings of a spoiled child. I am a woman, and in my heart to-night I feel like a very old one. I have my own

life. It is absolutely mine, and I will do with it as it seems best to me!"

"There, there, there!" Thetis expostulated. "Don't take on so. I'm not trying to make you do anything. But you told me all about the matter, and I was just telling you what I thought you ought to do."

Maria Anna wavered uncertainly. Then, slowly, she came close to the big woman.

"Will you let me go with your party to Texas?" she asked earnestly.

"What! Just as you are?" Thetis attempted to lighten the tone of the situation.

Maria Anna was not to be turned aside.

"Yes, just as I am," she said. "I have nothing except what I have on. I will do anything that I can to earn my keep. I have no money—nothing and—"

"Well, surely you would not mind if I had my husband stay over for a day or so and look into things for you—get your affairs into shape and—"

"No, no, no!" the girl pleaded. "You don't know what those two men might do to me then. Oh, I'm afraid! No, no, you will not betray me to them—say you will not? Promise—promise—"

She caught Mrs. Carrington's hand and pleaded with tears in her eyes. Terror was in her voice. She was a woman no longer, but a little, scared girl, bereft of all she held dear and trustworthy and not knowing what to do.

"No, of course, child. I will not tell any one anything that you do not wish. But do you mean to say that you are willing to run away like this, with me, a stranger, and make no effort to get what rightfully belongs to you?"

"I mean just that—*now*. Don't you understand? All this has gone too deep. *Now* I only want to be alone, to forget, to get whole again. Please let me. Won't you help me?"

"Of course I will help you. First, I'll give you some sensible clothes—good substantial things—some of Melissa's. She'll never miss them. Melissa is one of my children; I have fifteen living," Thetis Carrington explained.

"Of course I'll help you," she resumed,

"although it seems to me that the best way to help you is not to let you go away penniless into a strange, wild country. It is romantic and all that, but it is not sensible."

It was now that Maria Anna did an inspired thing. She came swiftly to the older woman and, throwing her arms about her neck, kissed her at almost the same moment asking: "Did you never do anything that was *unsensible*; answer quick, didn't you?"

"Well—well, yes."

"What? Quick, don't take time to think."

"Married the man I did."

"Was it a mistake?"

"No," the woman said, smiling.

"Well, then, have you ever regretted it?"

"I'm not going to be catechized, young miss." But she would not let Maria Anna out of her arms. "By the way," she added, to cover her embarrassment, "what is your name, anyhow?"

"I'm Maria Anna Bascom. You will call me Maria Anna, won't you?"

"I will not," Thetis announced with decision. "It sounds like a wedding-cake. I'll call nobody any such tom-fool name. I'll gladly call you plain Mary Ann, if you like that."

Mary Ann smiled feebly. At first she was not pleased, but in a moment she was happy over it.

"I think I like that name. Mary Ann! Yes, that will be a good name to start all over again with."

"I think," Mrs. Carrington remarked almost to herself, "that all this is shameful! And I am as weak as a jellyfish to aid and abet it, but you have such a wheedling way with you. And then—yes, it is true and you might as well know it, I like your *spunk*. I like the way you are taking it. I like *just* what you are doing about it."

"But you promise me that you will never tell any one a word of all this?" Mary Ann questioned.

"I promise."

"Not even that kind young man who brought me here—what's *his* name?"

Frederick Pope."

"Frederick Pope," she said it over slowly. "I like that name."

Thetis Carrington smiled. "Well, that's good. Maybe some day you will swap yours for it."

A quick cry of pain made her turn toward Mary Ann. "What's the matter?"

"You hurt—oh, you hurt so!" the girl whimpered. "You hurt right here," she put her hand tremblingly upon her heart. "I had almost forgotten. Oh, it hurts! Tell me, you know so much, will it take long; will it always go on like this, hurting so bad?"

Mrs. Carrington took her again in her ample arms and the girl sobbed miserably. She was a brave little person and was doing her best, but that day had demanded of her more than should be demanded of any one. She had been made to face life in all its hideous reality. And it was for the first time, too.

She had not gone under. She would not go under; but now, for a little, she must weep out some of the bitterness.

CHAPTER VI.

THE WARNING.

EARLY the next morning the caravan embarked on big, flat boats, locally known as "broad horns," and the crossing of the mighty Mississippi was begun. Frederick Pope, with surprise, noticed that the young woman who had claimed his protection the night before, had apparently become one of his fellow travelers. She did not cross with him, but was with Mrs. Carrington and several of the other women on one of the first boats.

The current was strong and several of the boats were taken down-stream, and missing the landing-place, had to be laboriously dragged back. A considerable amount of time was lost during this process; and while awaiting the reassembling of the caravan, young Pope decided to employ himself in conversation with Mary Ann.

She had landed some time since and was standing apart from the others, looking back across the broad expanse of dirty, sullen water. He came and stood beside her, lifted his wide-brimmed hat in a gallant salute and said: "Good morning."

"Yes, it is a good morning," she sweetly agreed, then seemed inclined to silence.

Fred felt somewhat disconcerted. He found himself following her gaze in a vain effort to discover what so absorbed her attention. Finally he lamely offered the suggestion: "You are interested in the river?"

She gave a quick, sharp look at him. "Yes," she admitted. "I am glad we are across. I shall be glad of every river we cross and—"

She stopped suddenly and seemed to await some remark from her companion, but Fred was not certain of what to say; so he remained silent, gazing with evident admiration at the beautiful girl.

"I have joined the party," she announced at last, as much to the big river as to her companion. "I also am going to Texas."

"I surmised as much," Fred commented, "but what for? I mean—well—"

He became confused and blushed.

"Yes, it does sound funny, doesn't it?" She laughed nervously and then, with a quick assumption of dignity, she added: "I have Texas fever."

"So have I!" he cried, his eyes kindling with enthusiasm. "It will be glorious out there. Oh, what a life!"

His eyes encountered those of his companion; his enthusiasm died away and in a troubled voice he added: "But for you, for a girl like you, it will be too hard; you—"

"I am not different from other women," she broke in. "Other women are going. Why can't I stand it?"

"Yes," Fred admitted, "other women are going, but they are with their own—that is, they have some one to protect them—I mean—" He stopped, feeling that he was brutal.

She nodded her head wisely. "There will be some one to protect me."

"Some one to protect you?" he repeated interrogatively.

She detected the keen disappointment in his voice and was pleased.

Fred anxiously awaited her next speech, but it was not forthcoming. He wondered what she meant. Surely she had not already discovered a protector in the caravan—of course not; but what did she mean?

He had brought her late the night before to Mrs. Carrington, begging for a place to sleep; and here she was, before ten the next morning, announcing that she had some one to protect her.

Suddenly he thought he had discovered the explanation and hastened to exclaim:

"Oh, you know some one in Texas—you are going to them?"

She laughed roguishly. She hoped that she had made an impression on this big, handsome, easy-going fellow, and she was delighted to learn that she had. It *did* make a difference to him whether she had other friends.

"I had not told you," she explained. "Well, I am going in the Carrington family as a teacher for the young twins—a sort of governess. Mrs. Carrington was kind enough to offer me that position. I had to do something, you know. I was willing to be a servant, anything to get away."

"Why?" broke from him.

She looked startled. "I—I—some day I may tell you. I think we had better join the others now. But I want to ask you to promise me something."

"Yes."

"Do not speak of last night to any one, ever—"

"I should not have done that anyway."

"Then you have not already—"

"No, except to Mrs. Carrington, when I brought you to her. I only told her enough to make her understand."

"That's all right. I told her myself—everything—but she's different. She promised not to talk about it. You understand, don't you? And now I want to thank you for what you did last night. I shall never forget it."

She put out her hand intending for him to take it, but instead he bowed and kissed it.

While he was in the act, Colonel Carrington joined them. "Ah! love-making so early in the day. Oh, you young rascals!"

The young woman jerked her hand away; Fred took a step back. They both looked very guilty and both blushed.

"Colonel Carrington," Fred began resentfully, "I—"

"Oh, never mind me! I'm an old man;

though I know what it is to be young. By gum! she's a good-looker. I suppose, Fred, you are going to try for that married man's allotment of land. It's just four times the amount given to a single one, you know." He laughed; a big, rough, loud laugh.

Frederick was annoyed, but realized that he could say nothing without making matters worse; besides, at the mention of the married man's increased allotment, the governess had raised her head proudly, sniffed the air, and moved rapidly away.

When she was out of earshot, Fred spoke his mind rather plainly to the colonel. When he had said his say, he paused and the older man remarked suavely: "I'm not going to quarrel with you, my boy. I like you too much. Besides, I suppose I *was* too plain-spoken. But then, you know, that's my way. I'm not exactly what you might call a courtier. I'm sorry, but then you must admit that it looks a bit strange. Here you come home to camp late at night from a little outing in the town and bring with you a lovely gal and, first thing I know, she's going to Texas with us all. She and my wife fixed it up somehow. The gal's made a mighty killing with the old woman. Then the next thing I see is you both twos-ing off here on the edge of things, looking across the river and kissing hands and all that sort of business."

"I assure you, colonel, I did not know that she was going with us until she told me herself just now."

"Oh!" the colonel began to guffaw. "So she just couldn't bear to see you go alone—she just had—"

Fred Pope interrupted: "I never saw the young lady before last night."

Non-committally the colonel ejaculated: "Humph!"

"I rescued her from a difficulty and she was thanking me when you came up; that was all."

"What sort of a difficulty?" Colonel Carrington asked, smiling broadly.

Then Fred showed discretion. "I think, since the lady is with us, she herself should tell you."

"Just as you please, my boy." The colonel winked. "Beauty in distress, gallant rescuer, off to the wilds together."

"Don't be angry," he added, putting his hands on the young man's shoulders. He had to reach up to do this. "Gee whiz! you are a whale of a fellow," he commented admiringly.

Fred shook himself free.

"Let us have no more of this," he said severely.

"Well, well, well!" Colonel Carrington passed from lightness to seriousness and then back to lightness again. "Mum's the word, my son. Good luck! Poor Melissa!" he muttered, as if to himself. "And I had it all planned out, too. Have you seen that little girl of mine?" he added, turning back to Fred.

"No, sir," the other responded stiffly.

"Well, come on over and meet her."

"Thank you, sir."

The two men walked away together. After a few steps Colonel Carrington remarked: "Oh! I was forgetting. There is a young negro man—a mulatto—over yonder by the big baggage-wagon, who was asking for you. I pointed you out to him, but he seems to be still searching. See him over yonder?"

Fred looked in the direction indicated, and after a brief scrutiny thought he recognized the familiar figure of Jude.

He was much surprised, and called to him. The mulatto came slowly forward. Fred waited for him, wondering what had happened and how the fellow had managed to be so far away from the plantation.

"How in thunder did you get here?" Pope demanded.

The mulatto looked apprehensive, then he grinned—a sickly, slimy sort of a grin.

"Well," Fred's tone implied that it was not at all well.

"Howdy," Jude felicitated.

"What are you doing here?"

"Nothin' much."

"What did you come for?"

"'Cause you wuz hyar."

"What?"

A note of insolence crept into his repetition of the speech: "'Cause you wuz hyar."

"Answer me directly. What did you follow me for?"

"To keep care of you, Doc. I 'lowed as—"

"What did you call me?"

"Doc."

"Where did you come by that name?"

The negro did not reply, and during the pause Fred Pope's mind was active.

Doc was a name that he had earned at college because of his success in curing animals. No one on the plantation had ever called him by it; indeed no one knew it except his old dead uncle to whom he had once written about the nickname. He had rather hoped that the old gentleman would adopt it, but he had not. How did Jude come to know it? Could he read? Had he read Fred's letters? If so, for what reason?

"Can you read?" he demanded.

"Little bit."

"How did you learn?"

"The ole man taught me."

"Who do you mean by 'the old man'?"

"Your uncle—"

"Don't ever call him 'old man,' again, nor me 'Doc,' either." Fred's voice rose as his annoyance mounted toward anger. "There is something too damn familiar in your manners. What do you mean by it?"

Jude looked quickly at him and then looked away. A sudden, sharp sparkle came into his eyes.

"I got er right to be familiar with you," he began impudently, but as Fred made a move toward him, the mulatto's voice died away in a whisper.

The young man caught him angrily by the collar.

"You impertinent yellow rascal, what does this mean?"

By a quick, snakelike movement the mulatto freed himself, jumped backward as if about to run; then, changing his mind, he cringingly said: "I 'lowed as how I had er right to be familiar, now I wuz free."

"Not with me, ever."

Fred's anger was rapidly receding as the ex-slave cowered before him. He began to see the matter in its true light. The man probably had little idea of the meaning of the word "familiar," and also it must be rather hard for a poor, ignorant creature, recently released from bondage, to get his bearings.

"Jude, how did you ever learn that my nickname was Doc?"

"In er letter you told the ole—I mean Mars William, about it."

"How did you come to read the letter?"

"Mars William read dat letter to me."

"Why?"

"I dunno."

Fred thought this explanation unsatisfying, but he did not see what he could do. Besides, the order to mount had been given, and he was impatient to locate his horse. He waited for one more question: "How did you get here?"

Jude spoke up at once. "As soon as I wuz freed, I found out you wuz gone, and I just took and stole er hoss and followed you. You got ter have somebody to keep care of you."

"You want to go on, with us, you mean?"

Jude spoke with determination: "That's what I's gwine do."

"You mean if I will *let* you?"

Again the ugly look spread across the mulatto's face and he passionately cried: "Den it don't mean nothin', dis' freedom what you done give us!"

Fred's own ideas on this subject were none too clear, and for that reason he more than resented having them questioned. He attempted to bluster.

"I tell you what you are to do. Go back home and return the horse to the man you stole it from, and go to work. Maybe you can get a job on the old plantation. I understand one of Mr. Thompson's overseers is going to rent it. Ask Judge Stimpson, he knows all about it."

Jude made no rejoinder, but turned away, and Fred was not surprised to see that he mounted a rather fine horse and joined with the advancing caravan. So Jude was going to Texas in spite of everything!

Maybe it was all for the best. Fred felt that he had been too impulsive. He had not considered the value of the devoted services Jude offered; for certainly the mulatto was behaving in the most doggedly faithful manner.

But, as he pondered, the idea come to Fred that, being "kept care of" might have a decidedly sinister side. However, he soon forgot all about it, and, before

nightfall, Jude was riding near him, without being ordered away.

The mulatto did not speak when Fred glanced back at him from time to time. And the white man failed to catch sight of the frequent, strange, malicious looks that the yellow face cast toward him.

The next day Fred saw nothing of Jude, because the mulatto had been asked to replace the driver on one of the baggage wagons whose teamster had been taken ill during the night.

All the morning of this day, Fred had ridden close beside one of the big covered ambulances. In this conveyance were the Misses Lord, two old-maid sisters, life-long friends of Mrs. Carrington. They were going to Texas "just to be going," and also, because life without "dear Thetis" was inconceivable. They were comfortably ensconced at opposite sides of the wagon in deep nests of hay.

Here they drowsed like two setting hens. Beside them, but decidedly not drowsing, was Melissa Carrington, who, having been duly presented to Frederick Pope, had lost no time in requesting his presence beside her wagon.

Melissa was a pretty, silly girl of twenty, who flirted outrageously with any and every man, and during this morning with Fred in particular. He gallantly responded to her, and they passed a very enjoyable time. Their happy laughter often rang out, and sometimes roused the sleeping Misses Lord, who would cackle and cluck a bit and insist upon being fed a few compliments by the handsome cavalier; then they would contentedly resume their drowsing.

Mrs. Carrington, keeping her weather-eye open for everything, noticed how affairs were progressing, and commented to Mary Ann upon Fred's evident infatuation.

The governess made no comment, but she felt slightly disappointed in young Pope. She had liked him, and, whereas she felt she had no mortgage upon him, and certainly had no desire to have any, she was sorry that he had been so easily taken in by such a feather-brain as Melissa Carrington.

Once, just before the noontime halt, the

wagon of Mrs. Carrington passed the one of the Misses Lord, and as it did so, Mary Ann was seated so that she could look directly at the flirtatious couple. She did so, somewhat sadly, perhaps, but only a small part of her thoughts were devoted to them. She was wondering desolately about herself and what was to become of her, alone, with no home, no friends, and no money. But before she was well out of earshot she heard the little vixenish Melissa remark: "Did you see that look?"

Fred's eyes attempted to make her be quiet, but Melissa persisted: "Did you see it?"

He inclined his head.

"She'll try to scalp me next time, I guess."

He only smiled.

"What a cunning dimple you have in your cheek when you smile," she cried.

Fred asked: "Are you hungry?"

He expected this to change the conversation, but Melissa impishly demanded: "For what?"

"For dinner," he responded soberly.

"Go on to her," Melissa flared out. "You keep looking after her in that sick-duck sort of a way."

"Miss Melissa, you are a tease," he said sourly.

"Not half as much a one as you—gee, you have pretty hair!" she interrupted herself to cry as he was lifting his hat in mock thanks for her calling him a tease.

He was as quick at this sort of thing as she was, and cried back: "So have you got lovely hair."

"Oh! thank you, sir. That's the first nice thing you have said since eleven o'clock."

"I'm hungry," and he attempted again to change the conversation.

"I think I know for what," she cried, and sprang from the wagon which was drawing up in the shade of a big tree.

Melissa shook her finger at him. "I'm going to get something to eat, wicked man. Come with me, eh? Or must you go dance attendance upon some one else?"

He went with her, and Melissa was pleased; but then she knew all the time that he would come.

Mary Ann did not leave the wagon, but ate with the Carrington twins, George and Georgina, aged eight. Two small negroes brought them plates of food.

During this hour they were passed by a party of gipsy men, six or eight of them, a young woman and two old hags. This crew went some hundred yards beyond and then made their stop. A fire was kindled, but they seemed to progress no further toward dinner; and before long, one of the old hags and a boy came back to beg for something to eat.

"They are all dirty thieves, these beggars," Colonel Carrington declared.

He was for driving them away; but Melissa insisted upon having one of the negroes gather up the fragments for the poor creatures.

"She has such a tender heart, my little girl," the colonel dotingly commented.

The boy departed with the food, but the old hag remained, munching a hunk of corn bread. She whimperingly announced that she could tell fortunes with the cards if her palm was crossed with silver.

Melissa was all excitement, and cried: "Oh! that's fun. Come, tell mine first. Daddy, pay her some money."

The old woman crouched down, and taking off her coarse apron, spread it on the ground before her. On this she put out the cards, and then began muttering to herself. She told the usual, obvious things, but Melissa was delighted.

Various persons gathered, while the old crone, from time to time, gazed furtively about, attempting to locate another victim; but mostly she bent her shaggy brows over her cards. Thin wisps of her dirty gray hair had escaped from her headkerchief, making her look more than ever like a witch.

Suddenly she spied Frederick Pope, who had just joined the group.

"You," she cried, "young man, you have a fate!" She raised her bony forefinger. "Let me tell your fortune."

She rose to her knees, disregarding the cards of Melissa's fortune.

"Finish mine first," the girl cried.

"There's nothing more," the hag mumbled petulantly; then electrically she cried

to Fred: "Pay me or not, I don't care, I'll tell yours."

She was so insistent that there was no gainsaying her. Fred made a move to run away, but his friends held him back.

"Go on—go on, old woman," they cried.

"First," she wailed, "you have an enemy! You have two enemies. One is close beside you and the other is fast approaching—he is galloping toward you. One wishes to take from you what you have; the other what you will have. But take care, young man, heed my warning: turn now and go back to your home! Before you I see only blood."

She came close to Fred.

"But you have luck in your pretty eyes, luck," she went on. "You will win, but beware—beware—two enemies—a raised knife—beware!" She paused and asked Fred if she should continue. He shook his head.

"No," he said, "I've had enough."

"Oh, yes, let me tell you more, my pretty young man," she wheedled.

In embarrassment, and with the shouts and laughter of the crowd breaking about him, he turned away.

Melissa's fortune was resumed. Others took her place. Indeed, the old woman was kept busy until the caravan started again on its way. It jogged along, and, as they passed the gipsies, the old woman joined her companions, but before she did so, two members of Colonel Carrington's party had looked at her with more than passing interest.

And yet they had neither of them had their fortunes told. One was Mary Ann, who had been informed by Mrs. Carrington of Fred's mysterious fortune, and the other was Jude, who had been on the outskirts of the crowd, drinking in the revelation with superstitious terror.

CHAPTER VII.

AN ADVENTURE BEFORE DAWN.

THAT day, after the encounter with the gipsy fortune-teller, their progress was slow and uneventful. The country was low and soggy, and the baggage too heavy for

the roads that were almost, one might say, no roads at all.

Following their usual custom, during the heat of the day, the women had retired to the big, covered wagons and gossiped or slept; sometimes peeping out from the flapping, canvas side-curtains at the swampy, heavily timbered landscape. As soon as the sun had become less positive in his embraces, several of the women, and the Carrington twins, mounted horses and rode with the men.

The caravan now entered a particularly low-lying country, and was forced to go some distance out of the way to avoid a dense cane-brake.

"As soon as we get shet of this swamp, I think we'll be on the lookout for a place to camp," Colonel Carrington remarked to Hamilton, one of his sons, who was riding between himself and young Pope.

"I'm interested in that," Hamilton responded. "I'm hungry." He laughed and showed his big white teeth.

He was a strong, well-knit young fellow of about thirty, inclined to stoutness; with a quick temper, reddish hair, and a decided fondness for the opposite sex. Colonel Carrington had four of his grown sons with him, although Fred had only come into contact with Hamilton and James, a tall, dark, rather morose, middle-aged man.

Pope most often rode with the two Rogers boys—Ed and Steve—who were as fond of one another as the proverbial *Damon* and *Pythias*. Ed was married to Colonel Carrington's daughter, Fannie, a frail, blond, little person, still passable looking; but with a tradition of former beauty, which she was always pathetically attempting to live up to. Colonel Carrington, in his usual blunt and not over-refined way, had told Fred, that "them Rogers boys always air such partners, I sometimes wonder how they does about my little Fannie."

Fred, noticing that the young governess was riding alone, and looking rather miserable, guided his horse in her direction. She did not seem in the least glad of his company, but he determined to remain. For a long period they rode slowly forward, without a word.

"You know, I think you might tell a

fellow your name," Fred said at last. "I don't know that yet."

She looked up at him. Her eyes were wistful, and she spoke sadly: "My new name is Mary Ann."

"Mary Ann is a good beginning, but what comes after that?"

"I haven't decided yet," she announced thoughtfully, and then, with a little crooked smile, she added: "I think I'll just leave it like that. It is enough to answer all purposes now."

Fred attempted with a light remark to break her sadness.

"I suppose," he began jovially, "after what Colonel Carrington said, you might fear that I was going to attempt to make it 'Mary Ann Pope.'"

"I hadn't thought of it at all," she remarked with an indifference that rang true.

He flushed, and began a stammering explanation, and finally brought up red and confused with: "Are you angry with me?"

"No!" she cried. "Why should I be?"

"I thought—" Fred began, and then, as he hesitated, she broke in with:

"Think what you please, sir, but I *know* this is where we are going to camp for the night. See, the others are beginning to draw up."

It was as she said. At the edge of the woods the big, boatlike wagons were being ranged alongside of each other, and the horses were soon being unharnessed. Fred was loath to leave his companion, but as they both had duties to perform, he had to.

Soon supper was cooking, and the smell, in the open air, was good to the nostrils. A little later the none-too-carefully prepared food was being ravenously consumed by the various groups of men and women gathered about the big, central camp-fire. The night came on quickly, and the air was sweet and fresh, with just a hint of chill that was stimulating. But it did little stimulating to the crowd of weary travelers who, in a surprisingly short time, had adjusted themselves for sleeping.

Fred, as often before, was surprised that everything worked so like machinery; then he realized that, before he had joined them, these people had been many days on the journey. They were, by this time, well

practised in doing their various portions of the common labors in the easiest and most comfort-giving fashion.

Fred had scarcely spoken to Jude since that first morning. He thought of the mulatto now, and wondered how he was faring.

He looked about in the gloom, but could not discover the whereabouts of the servant. However, he did not give Jude much thought, but flung himself down beside one of the Rogers boys.

Through a haze of satisfaction he allowed himself to drowse, while creeping over him was that pleasant sense of rest well earned.

Silence came at last. The fire died down. The night crept close in. Something prompted Fred to raise himself on his elbow and look about him. After a long look he got up and moved quietly forward until, with considerable difficulty, he succeeded in arousing Neil Carrington, a handsome boy of fourteen, who was supposed to be on watch. Instead of attending the fire and keeping a lookout for things in general, he had sunk into a deep sleep.

"Neil?"

"Yes, what?"

"Wake up, boy. Don't make any noise. Listen to me. What had we better do?"

"Why? What?" Neil demanded in a whisper. Fright had caused him to awaken thoroughly.

"Get up," Fred commanded; and, when the boy was on his feet, he continued: "look over there."

Neil did as he was bid.

"Gracious alive!" he cried, "a fire!"

"Yes, and whose?"

Neil said nothing, but continued to look. "It is a camp-fire," he announced thoughtfully, and then, all at once, added: "I know. It's those gipsies—the ones we passed just after dinner."

"Oh!" Fred was crestfallen. "I thought surely it was Indians."

"Hardly this close to civilization," Neil mocked; then, with juvenile indecision, added: "but you never can tell."

"What had we better do about it?" Fred asked. "It might be Indians. Do you think we ought to rouse the others?"

It is not more than a mile away, I should say."

"Can't ever be sure of distances at night," Neil reminded him. "But it seems to me there is no need to arouse any one. I'll stay awake now, and listen. You go back to sleep, Mr. Pope. And if I hear anything I'll call you. I think it's just as well to let our fire die out. What do you think?"

Fred said he did not see why. "If those others have any eyes in their heads they have already located us, and—"

Neil interrupted: "Yes, but then, with the fire out, they could not find us so easily if they decided to—*investigate* us." He grinned, showing his teeth, which were long and sharp like a wolf's.

"Do as you think best," Fred assented.

"All right, old man, go to sleep." Neil called this over his shoulder as he seated himself beside the embers.

Frederick Pope lay down again, but with the determination to keep awake and not leave things to the mercy of the sleepy boy. But he was himself very weary, and soon was dead to the world.

He slept soundly for some time, and then was awakened; by just what he did not know. The camp was silent. The fire was out. He spoke Neil's name, softly; but there was response. Strange sounds came from the woods near by.

The young man had no idea how late it was. The sky was overcast, and no stars were visible whereby he could calculate the passage of time. There was a freshness in the air that made him suspect that it was growing close to dawn. He propped himself on his arm, determined to guard the camp until it was light.

He kept very still; but, as nothing occurred to alarm him, he slipped into a reverie. It was certainly not sleep, for he was aware of everything about him. But, then he certainly could not have been wide awake, for when, after some while, a light touch came on his arm, he wheeled in terror, for he had heard no one approach.

"Mr. Pope?" Fred knew that voice.

"Yes. Oh! it is you, Miss Mary Ann. Thank Heaven! I thought—"

"Sh!" she commanded.

"What's the matter?" Fred demanded in a whisper.

"Get up and follow me. Be careful not to wake any one."

"What? What's the matter," the man persisted.

"Nothing terrible," she whispered lightly. "Don't be afraid," she added, when she felt him trembling with excitement. "Can you see in this darkness? I will lead you. Here's my hand. I have cat's eyes, you know."

"Yes, I can see," Fred murmured, but he took her hand, which was icy.

She led him in silence until they were beyond where there was danger of disturbing the camp. Then she released his fingers.

"Now," she began, "we can speak above a whisper. I suppose you think that I am getting you into scrapes; but this time I think I have done you a good turn."

"What do you mean?" he cried.

"Sh!" she fiercely whispered. "Don't talk so loud. You will rouse the others, and I want this to be *our* adventure."

"Go on!" Fred prompted, pleased at the implication.

"Your horse has been stolen." Her tone was almost gleeful as she announced it. "Yes," she resumed, "it was stolen by the gipsies. Or rather by a gipsy. Just a little while ago. I was not in the camp. I could not sleep and had wandered away. Oh, not far, but over in the direction of the gipsies' camp. I did not know anything about them then. Their fire was hidden from me by that clump of trees. I must have got lost, because I wandered about considerably, and finally I saw a fire, and thinking it was ours, I went toward it—carefully and slowly—and, when half-way there, a man passed me with a horse. He was leading it, and very cautiously, too, and the beast's feet were muffled. I have very keen senses, and to-night, I seem to be particularly alive.

"I heard the man coming, and crouched down, so as not to be outlined against the sky, and they almost stepped on me. I could see fairly distinctly, but not enough to know who the man was. I did realize, however, by his stealthy behavior, that

something was wrong. I did not know what to do. I did not know where our camp was. I dared not call or make any noise. Besides, I feared that I might be mistaken, and then I should have been mercilessly laughed at." She paused. "I don't like to be laughed at, you know," she added playfully.

Fred cried: "Go on, go on! What did you do?"

"I followed the man and the horse, creeping forward mostly on my knees. They went toward the fire, and much frightened but awfully interested, I followed. The man and the horse entered the firelight, and I crept to the edge of the darkness and lay flat. Hidden by the bushes, I looked and listened. It was then I saw that it was your horse.

"I love horses, you know, and this morning I had watched yours closely. I should know him after ten years. Yes, I am perfectly sure. The gipsy spoke with another of the band, who was dozing by the fire, and then took the horse away. I followed again, and saw where he hitched him. I came back, then, and roused you."

"How did you find me?" Fred inquired. "I thought you said you did not know in which direction our camp was."

"Yes, that is true," she admitted; "but the gipsies were camped near the road, and so are we, and I just followed the road! I went in the wrong direction at first; then, remembering some landmarks, I retraced my steps. Now, if you will go with me, I'll show you where the horse is, and we can get him back without any to-do."

"Don't you think we had better return to our camp and arouse the others, instead of creeping off like this?" Fred suggested.

"Are you afraid to go without reinforcements?" Mary Ann taunted him.

"Yes, afraid for you," he quickly responded.

"Don't be. You waste time and worry," she spoke sharply. "Have you your pistol?"

"Yes."

"Good!" she commented in a business-like way. "And I have mine also."

They crept off through the darkness, but after they had gone a short way, Fred

whispered: "I should not have left the camp after all without waking some one. The place is absolutely unguarded. Neil Carrington is asleep."

"Was he supposed to be on guard?"

"Yes."

"Well," she announced, "it's too late now to bother about it. Come on," she cried impatiently, "or your horse will be spirited away. Hurry, but be careful."

They went forward in silence for some time, and then Fred broke in: "I think I shall tell Colonel Carrington about Neil's sleeping. He should not trust night guard to that boy."

Mary Ann smiled wisely.

"Neil is Colonel Carrington's son," she remarked. "Tell him of his boy's deficiencies and you will get no thanks."

"I can't help that," Fred rejoined. "Colonel Carrington should be told. Too much is at stake. Soon we will be in Indian country."

She made no answer to this, but continued to lead the way. Silently and unerringly they went to the spot where the horse was hitched.

"This is a horse, certainly," Fred commented, "but is it *mine*? I can't see a blink under these trees."

"I can't either," she agreed; "you'll have to take my word for it; the horse is yours! Come, lead him out into the open."

Fred was unhitching the animal when Mary Ann clutched at his arm.

"What's the matter?" he cried.

She clutched him more tightly.

"Sh!" she whispered fiercely. "Listen."

Fred did listen, but heard no sound. He had the horse unhitched and held him by the bridle. After a few moments he whispered back: "What is it?"

"Be quiet," she breathed, "don't you hear—some one is creeping up on us! Oh, I can't see—and I'm afraid!" Her voice shook.

Another silence, during which Fred vainly strove to catch a sound, but could hear nothing. He felt Mary Ann's lips against his ear:

"Some one is right here by us!" Her whisper continued like a faint breeze: "Get

your pistol ready! I have mine! Leave the horse! Drop on your knees, then we'll scuttle for the open!"

"We'll get separated," Fred whispered. "I won't leave you—"

"Forget me!" she commanded.

They dropped to the ground, but before they could make a move forward a light flared up. Instinctively Fred turned his head toward it. He saw that they were close upon the gipsy camp, and that the light was caused by a wisp of straw that had just been thrown on the black but smoldering embers. He saw a dark figure before the fire, then he heard an explosion! It was close and greatly startled him. He jerked his head around. The flare of the straw had died down. All was inky blackness again, and out of this blackness he heard a sharp cry of pain and the sound of some one running, while the smell of burning powder was thick about him.

"What is it?" broke from him in a frightened gasp.

A woman's voice exulted: "I hit him! Didn't you hear him cry?"

The voice was Mary Ann's, and she no longer whispered.

"You shot?" Fred cried. "Are you hurt?"

"Yes, I shot!" she replied. "No, I am not hurt," she continued. "The man was almost upon you. He had a bare knife—a nasty knife. When that flare of light came your back was toward him, but I was almost looking into his eyes. I fired, just in time!"

Again the woods were illumined.

More straw had been thrown on the gipsies' fire. Everything about was bright. Fred and his companion both looked toward the light. There was more than one dark figure gathered about the blaze—the gipsy camp was wildly awake!

Fred realized that in the glare both Mary Ann and himself had been revealed. "We are in for it now!" he coolly commented.

Several gipsies came rushing toward them.

"Get on the horse!" Fred commanded the young woman. "There is still a chance for you to get away!"

— Mary Ann did not obey, but quickly

hissed: "And leave you alone in this fix? No!" Then she spoke so rapidly that before the advancing gipsies had time to reach them she had said: "Let me manage. I'm cleverer with people than you. Maybe we can get out of this. Bring the horse. Follow me!"

To Fred's astonishment she advanced rapidly to meet the approaching men. He and the horse were at once beside her. When the gipsies were almost upon them they saw that Fred and Mary Ann both had pistols ready for action. They stopped, undecided.

Then Mary Ann announced in a loud, steady voice: "We are quite harmless. But be careful of our pistols—they might happen to go off!"

Seeing that the gipsies were closing in on them, she made a virtue of necessity by suggesting: "Let's all go over to your fire."

Surrounded, Mary Ann and her companion leading the horse, they quickly advanced into the open space before the gipsies' camp-fire.

Every one seemed to wonder what it was all about, and in this amazement Fred was at one with the crowd. Mary Ann did not leave them long in doubt.

"One of our horses strayed away," she explained, "and we have been looking for him."

She waved her hand to indicate the animal that Fred held. For the first time the young man saw that it was as she had said—his horse.

"We found the horse close to your camp, but got lost in the darkness," the brave girl continued, conscious that the gipsies were closing in on them. "We could not find our way back to our camp—right over there—and—and so we fired a pistol just—just to see where we were—" She was faltering, but, catching a deep breath, she resumed and went steadily on: "We thought your camp was near, but could not be sure, so we fired off a pistol—in the air, of course—and it brought us your light. Now we'll go back to our own camp," she added. "I'm sorry we had to disturb you, but"—she turned to her companion—"Mr. Pope, give me some money."

Fred fished in his pocket and brought forth three silver dollars and some small change. She took the three big silver disks.

"There," she began, "are souvenirs of our late call." She threw the money on the ground.

"Come!" she said to Fred; and as she bravely walked out of the group and started toward the road she called back to him so that the astonished crowd could hear it: "Keep one eye on them and your pistol, too! If they attempt to follow us, let them have it!"

No one moved to molest them, and in a few minutes they were in the open road and headed toward their own camp. The cowed gipsies, left some hundred yards behind, stared after them.

"Well," Fred cried, "you are a wonder! I don't know how you did it. Nor how you thought it all up—" he broke off suddenly, remembering something: "Who was it you shot?"

She promptly replied: "It was not one of the gipsies."

"Who was it, then?" he flashed back.

"I'm not sure yet. I'll tell you when I am. I think I know, but I must be certain. The light only lasted a second, and I was so frightened! I was so frightened that I fired without aiming, and then I was blinded by the smoke and the light went out!"

"You mean—no, it could not be—you don't mean you think it was one of our party?" Fred cried, aghast.

"Mr. Pope," she spoke haughtily, "I said that when I was sure I would tell you. I will; but not before. Now let's hurry back!"

Fred insisted that she mount his horse, saying that he would lead it back to camp.

At first she refused, and then, laughing, added: "Why not? It is dark."

"What has that got to do with it?" he demanded.

"Well, I'm not exactly dressed to ride astride, and—"

However, she mounted, and in almost absolute silence they wended their way toward camp. Fred was always listening for the possible pursuit of the gipsies; and, had he known it, his companion was doing the

same. He was also busy thinking of this fresh attack upon his life, and a suspicion was fast developing into a conviction. But he, like Mary Ann, wanted to be sure.

He thought of questioning her more; but the sound of her voice, when she had refused to talk about the matter, still rang in his ears. He thought he would better allow this young woman to have her own way—certainly, this night, she had proved that she was worthy of the privilege.

The day began to break as they went forward—a wonderful, fresh, sweet, young day; and these two, flushed and sweet and young also, wandered into the camp with it.

"When I'm grown up I'll never ride any other way than this," Mary Ann confided to him.

She stopped shyly, and Fred smilingly inquired: "When you are *grown up*? That's funny!"

She answered sadly: "That was force of habit. You see, until just a few days ago, I never thought of myself except as a child and—"

She was suddenly silent, and Fred felt strangely drawn to her.

The gray light was just beginning to be faintly tinged with red. Everything was fresh with dew. A horse neighed, and Fred responded good-naturedly. Fred went toward the young woman and, letting go the horse's bridle, held out both his hands.

"I owe you my life!" he began, but she waved him aside.

He would not be gainsaid, and began again: "I must thank you for giving me back what I had lost without you!"

She smiled roguishly. "Oh, boo!" was her only comment. She was, all at once, deeply concerned about her hands. "I've got a splinter or a thorn broken off in my *littlest* finger!" she lamented.

And then he could not help it; before she could defend herself he put both his arms about her and kissed her.

She jerked herself free; and with eyes that flashed, but which also had a merry twinkle in them, fled from him and was soon safe in her own wagon.

They neither of them realized that other eyes had seen, other ears had heard them. And all that had been seen and all that

had been heard was misconstrued, for she who had discovered them was a wildly jealous girl—in other words, Melissa Carrington.

CHAPTER VIII.

MAKING ENEMIES.

THAT same morning Fred spoke to Colonel Carrington about Neil, and suggested that, when the boy was on guard, some other person should be with him. His suggestion met with a reserved silence; and, from the old gentleman's manner, Fred saw that it was as Mary Ann had said it would be; he got no thanks for his information. And, from that time on, he noticed a growing chilliness in the colonel's manner.

Fred and Mary Ann had agreed to make no mention of the horse-stealing episode because, as she pointed out, it was all over and done with except discovering the identity of their unknown assailant; and in that matter she said she desired the freedom that could only be gained by their silence.

"It will be a secret between ourselves. That will be rather fun—yes?" she had said, and he had assured her that it would be.

And, after the romantic ending of the episode, he felt that the entire adventure was a bit of his own personal property and far too precious to be submitted to the inspection of the others.

Before nine o'clock, however, out of a blue sky, as it were, the colonel sent this bolt at Fred: "Pope, you are a queer duck! First, you joint my outfit, post-haste, leaving all your affairs that couldn't be settled overnight. First time you are alone you go into town and lug back a pretty gal who insists upon following you. Next you spring a mulatto free-nigger on us. Says he's your servant, but he don't serve; at least, not you. Though I understand from the other niggers that he works like a horse loading and unloading the baggage and tending the cattle—I'm not complaining; he earns his keep—but what are you going to do with him? You never speak to him, for I've watched you, and

sometimes he glares at you as though he could kill you!"

At this Fred Pope gave a start and had difficulty in forcing his multitudinous thoughts sufficiently into the background to attend to what the old colonel was saying.

"It's not that I mean to pry into your affairs," Carrington continued, "but, well, I should just like a little information on the subject."

"Sorry, sir, I can't give you any!" Fred responded. "I don't know why Jude insists upon accompanying me to Texas. I forbade it; he came anyhow. That's why I leave him alone. I suppose when I get settled, if he wants to work for me, I'll have to hire him. If he doesn't want to work for me, then he's not goin' to bother me. He's free; I'm free!" He took a deep breath of the cool air and rolled his big shoulders contentedly.

"Well, well, well," Colonel Carrington remarked, "I can't make you out!"

"I'm not hard to make out," Fred laughed.

"Maybe not," the veteran said doubtfully; then with conviction he announced: "It's fine not to worry about anything."

There was a period of silence, after which the colonel returned to the charge.

"I suppose, for instance, you are not in the least concerned about Jude having shot himself early this morning!"

Fred gave a sharp cry of surprise.

"There you are!" the colonel resumed. "I suppose you didn't even know, eh?" Getting no response he ran on: "Yes, shot in the hand!"

"How?" Fred cried impatiently.

"Says he was cleaning one of the guns. Didn't know it was loaded. Of course it went off; that kind always do—"

"When was this?" Pope interrupted.

"Oh, early this morning! You were still asleep, I suppose; but Neil heard the gun go off," the colonel maliciously observed. "It's not much of a wound, I'm told," he volunteered. "One of the women cleaned and bandaged it for him—"

"I must see him!" Fred cried, and, to the old gentleman's astonishment, dashed off in search of Jude.

"Well, did you ever!" Colonel Carrington exclaimed. "Now you would think he just *loved* that low-life mulatto!"

"Where's Jude?" Fred rushed about asking any and every one, but nobody seemed to know. No one would admit having seen him in some time.

Fred soon made the discovery that Jude's horse was missing, and, in the course of his inquiries, he learned that Steve Rogers's gun had also been "misplaced." Without a moment's hesitation Fred ascribed the missing rifle to Jude's dishonesty. The gun *seemed* to be gone—Jude certainly *was* gone!

Pope's impulse was to go at once to Mary Ann and talk the matter over with her. But she was in one of the wagons, and he hesitated to disturb her. A preposterous idea, that was only an amplification of his suspicion of the night before, had taken possession of him. He now believed that it was Jude who had tracked them through the woods, and who would have taken Fred's life had it not been for the quick shot of the plucky little governess. And, even so, if it had not been for the revealing flash from the gipsies' fire, her shot would never have reached its aim!

But where had Jude gone now? How had he managed to escape without any one's knowledge? Had he an accomplice in the caravan? If so, who could it be? And why under the sun did the mulatto hate Fred?

All at once the affair at Eggleston's Spring came back into the young man's mind. Had that been Jude's doing, also? It seemed more than probable.

Fred recalled the friendly way in which his horse and the assassin's horse had neighed. That was the sort of thing that should have impressed him at the time, but it had completely escaped his notice.

How blind he had been! How many chances he had given Jude! But had he? Now, that he came to think of it, had he not always foiled the mulatto? Had he not conducted himself almost as if he had been warned of this enemy?

"And come to think of it," Fred muttered, "I *had* been warned by that gipsy fortune-teller. She had spoken of an up-

raised knife—but *two* enemies, one that was yet to come."

Fred was astonished to find how much truth had been in the old hag's warning. He wondered if it had been this warning that had spurred Jude to make another attempt upon his life. And that other enemy, who was he? Would he surely turn up? She had said he was galloping; if so, whence and why?

"Well," Fred told himself, "there are no signs of No. 2 yet, and No. 1 has gone."

He attempted to dismiss the matter, temporarily, from his mind, but could not. Did Mary Ann know that Jude was gone? Had she recognized him last night? Had they seen each other since? Then a thought of her possible danger coming to him, he disregarded everything and dashed up to the wagon wherein the governess should be riding. Had she, perhaps, already come to grief at the mulatto's hands?

He called to her.

She answered cheerfully; and Fred gave a great sigh of relief.

"Are you all right?" he persisted.

"Of course!" she cried, but did not show herself.

"Are you alone?" the young man nervously inquired. "I must see you; let me see you!" he insisted.

It was the face of Thetis Carrington that appeared at the round opening in the rear of the covered wagon. "You can't see her, you bad boy!" Mrs. Carrington laughed. "She's not dressed, and I'm here to chaperon you two, this time!"

Impatiently Fred cried: "I must speak to Miss Mary Ann!"

"Well, speak ahead, you impetuous youth!" Thetis rallied, "I'll pretend not to be present. You two silly children, I wish you joy! When does the happy event take place?"

Fred was so embarrassed that everything went from his mind.

"I'll speak to her later!" he stammered and rode angrily away.

He headed toward Colonel Carrington, and on the way decided, for the present, to tell no more about Jude than he had to. He therefore only announced the disappearance of the mulatto.

"That's rather unnecessary news," the colonel remarked, "for the whole caravan is already talking of it."

The old gentleman was all curiosity, and attempted to get some information from Fred, but signally failed. Finally, in desperation, he had to tell himself out loud: "I guess he stole something—that's the explanation—"

"He did," Fred volunteered.

"What?" Colonel Carrington snapped.

"Steve Rogers's rifle."

At these words the colonel's face fell. "More than that, I'll bet!" he suggested.

There was a pause, then, in lieu of anything better to say, the veteran observed: "It's always like that with free-niggers. I just naturally abominate them!"

Another pause, then: "What are you going to do about this fellow?" he asked.

"Nothing," young Pope replied. "There is nothing to do. I'm glad he's gone, that's all. I'm not going to worry about it. Why should I?"

"You refuse to worry about anything," the old man said in a carping tone.

"That's about it," Fred admitted.

"All except Mary Ann," Colonel Carrington fired this shot viciously.

"What about her? She's still in the wagon, isn't she?" Fred quickly asked.

"As though you didn't know?" the colonel sniffed. "You've watched that wagon like a hawk does a chicken. I know, I've kept my eye on you!" he ended with a laugh.

Fred made no retort, and they rode on in silence until noon.

Nothing more of importance occurred during the day except, after dinner, their party was joined by a strange, romantic-looking individual, long of hair, and dressed in fringed buckskin.

Fred inquired of Neil Carrington, with whom he was riding, about this new member of their outfit, and was informed that he was a "bee-hunter."

"A bee-hunter," Fred repeated. "What is that?"

"He makes his living hunting and robbing the hives of wild bees and selling the honey and wax," Neil explained. "He knows the country like a book, and is a

fine person to have along with us. He is on his way to Nacogdoches, too, and dad was mighty glad to have him come along. You should have a talk with him. He's a fine chap, witty and smart as a steel-trap, but, all the same, as simple as a child."

Fred thought this sounded comical coming from such a young person as Neil, but he made no comment.

The boy resumed: "It's funny—living alone in the open seems to make men like that!"

There was a short pause, and then Neil spoke quietly: "You are like that, too, and you never lived in the open, did you?" He looked admiringly at Frederick Pope, and added: "It's funny!"

Fred felt slightly embarrassed and quickly asked: "How can he make a living selling honey and wax to folks that could get the stuff as easily as he does?"

"That's just what they can't do," Neil corrected. "The bees have to be followed and their hives located. This takes time and no end of trouble. When the hive is found the real work begins. The bees are none too friendly, you know," he laughed and showed his wolf-teeth. "The hives are often in the very top of a rotten tree. It's mighty tough if you start to cut it down, but mighty weak if you try to climb it!"

So they talked on. Fred rode with him all day. He liked the boy, and the youth was infatuated with him, as a boy often is with a man whom he *sees* to be bigger and stronger and older than himself, and *believes* to be wiser, more forceful and finer than he dare hope to be. Fred little suspected that he had that day put into operation the machinery that would soon cause Neil to dislike him. He did not understand that by reporting his negligence to his father he had offered an affront to the boy's dignity which could never be wiped away.

The day passed, and Mary Ann did not show herself, nor did Melissa Carrington. When the caravan stopped for the night the governess still did not appear, but Melissa did. Then it was that Fred Pope learned, with surprise, that he was out of favor with the colonel's daughter. He could not guess the reason.

Melissa would barely speak to him, and when he went to have supper beside her, she deliberately got up and settled herself elsewhere. Fred went at once to Mother Carrington, to see if, through her, he could discover what he had done. But the old lady earnestly assured him that she did not know anything about it.

Night came on; still Mary Ann did not leave her wagon; and, although Fred prowled about it, he got no sound nor sight of her. He gave up his quest finally, and, going back to the fire, settled himself comfortably with his pipe and sank into a stupor.

Soon he was asleep, and, without a single dream, he remained thus until roused by the others. It was early morning. Breakfast was eaten hurriedly, and soon they were on the road.

Fred was riding by himself until joined by Colonel Carrington. It took no searching look to see that the old gentleman was unusually upset.

"Fred Pope," he began at once, "I want to know what you mean by such goings-on, unless you intend to marry the girl?"

"What girl?" Fred asked.

"This Mary Ann What-you-may-call-it. Do you intend to marry her?"

Fred was decidedly amused.

"I hadn't thought of marrying her," he said.

"Well, I never!" the colonel exclaimed.

Fred disregarded the interruption and continued lightly: "You, yourself, said something of the sort the other day in reference to the land, but—doesn't it seem a little early to think about it?"

"Well, it doesn't seem too early for all sorts of other things," Colonel Carrington tartly responded.

"What sort of things?" Fred was surprised, and his tone conveyed this.

"That's right, try to appear innocent!" Colonel Carrington snapped. "But I know too much already!"

Fred saw that his companion was irritated, but he could not resist remarking: "Well, if you already know too much, why do you ask me to tell you more?"

The old man swelled with rage.

"None of your impudence, sir! I will have none of it! You shall tell me! I will know the truth of this whole matter. Tell me, sir, what is it?"

Fred was not in the least ruffled and answered calmly: "I will gladly tell you the truth of anything I know, but first you will have to tell *me* what you are driving at."

"I mean this Mary Ann business?"

Fred started. "What, sir?"

"Oh!" the old man cried, "you thought I did not know, did you? Well, I do. First, you come tagging in with a girl that you find fighting in a low dive of a saloon—"

Frederick Pope interrupted by demanding shortly: "Who told you that?"

"My wife," the veteran snarled.

Fred was astonished and showed it, but he managed to keep calm.

"Yes," the angry man resumed, "first we are told a tale of lost-and-strayed innocence, or something of that sort. A pretty story, and Mrs. Carrington believed it, and gave the girl a place to look after our youngsters, yes! And, after that—well—the first thing I know you two are gallivanting about in the woods at night together—all night, too, for that matter. When morning comes, even, you are not through, but must needs come billing and cooing into the camp, right up to the very wagons. It is too much. I will not countenance such goings on!"

He paused for breath, puffing like a blown horse, and Fred took advantage of the occasion to remark: "You are getting yourself all excited for nothing. I suppose it does look bad, but it is easily explained."

He was surprised that his sense of humor was helping him to remain calm as he briefly told the colonel the episode of the horse-stealing and of his and the governess's part in the retrieval.

When he had finished the old man remarked: "And I suppose you expect me to swallow that?" He strummed with his knuckles on his saddle-bow. "I should think," he resumed, "a man of your education would have done better. You must admit that, it is—well—a bit thin!"

"Thin or thick," Fred coldly retorted, "it's the truth." His tone was unmistak-

ably arrogant, so he added: "Now what are you going to do about it?"

"I tell you it won't do, that's what I say!" the old man cried.

Fred spoke in quick staccato: "You mean—you think—I'm a liar?"

Colonel Carrington was angry, but still had enough hold of himself to realize that, if the word "liar" once passed his lips, the affront could never be adjusted. So he did a most uncharacteristic thing—he temporized.

"I did not say any such thing, but I did say that your explanation was decidedly flimsy."

The colonel seemed to be awaiting some response, but when he saw that he was going to get none, he broke forth again: "I will not have such carryings-on in my outfit! If you intend acting in this way, I am sure I can't stop you. Nor have I any wish to. It is none of my business, but—but"—he raised his hand menacingly—"I will not have you in my crowd. You'll have to get out! That's all."

"Are you through, sir?" Fred nonchalantly inquired.

For response the colonel merely glared at him.

"Because if you are," the young man began, "I will tell you that I have no intention of leaving this caravan until we reach our destination! It suits my convenience to continue with it, and continue I will!"

There was a hard flinty ring in his low-pitched voice, and, having spoken, Fred turned his head and gave his entire attention to the landscape.

He seemed quite oblivious of the furious man beside him who cried:

"We'll see about that! We'll see about that!" So saying, Colonel Carrington dug his spurs into his horse. The poor creature plunged forward wildly, and, to prevent his bolting, had to be pulled in so shortly that the bit cut his mouth.

The angry man seemed about to speak, but controlled himself, and, after a wild side-look at his young companion, cantered away and joined the two Rogers boys who were riding some distance in advance of the caravan.

Fred Pope was thinking. So, after all,

Mrs. Carrington had betrayed the girl's confidence. But that could be expected. A woman would be apt to tell her husband. He was sorry, though, because, as Mary Ann had remarked, Mrs. Carrington was different.

He turned his mind to the young woman. Was she having a hard time of it? Were the others being nasty to her? He had heard that women could, under such circumstances, be fiendish to one another. Who could have seen Mary Ann and himself that night? Was this matter the cause of Mary Ann keeping so close these last days?

"After all," Fred commented to himself, "I can't have so compromised the girl."

He certainly hadn't intended to—and yet? His own thoughts in the matter had been so unassailable that it was difficult for him to arrive at another point of view. What had his actions seemed to others, that was the question. For himself, he did not care what people thought; but he certainly did not want to hurt the girl.

He liked her. She was a nice girl—pretty too and kissable. Yes—at the remembrance of that snatched kiss in the early morning he thrilled afresh.

Would it be such a bad thing, after all, to marry her?

"How conceited!" he cried aloud. "She probably wouldn't have me!"

But a wife would be an excellent thing, and Mary Ann had a lot of mighty fine qualities. He did not know very much about her, it was true, but she did not know any more about him.

"Oh, the idea is comical!" he decided. "The very notion of asking a woman, that I've known less than a week, to marry me!"

But why not? something inside him queried.

The return of Colonel Carrington interrupted his musings.

"See here, Pope," the old man began, "I was hasty and hot under the collar just now, and I don't know what I said, but half of it I don't mean; besides, Steve Rogers says I've been a darn fool—"

Fred asked acidly: "So you have been discussing it with him?"

"I told him about it—yes—why not?" the colonel questioned.

Fred was silent for a few moments.

"I don't know," he reflected; "I suppose it is all right. A thing like this will spread in a small party like ours. Everybody will have to know it sooner or later, I dare say; but, well, I don't think I would have talked about it with anybody, just yet. Oh! what's the use?" he added wearily, and jerked his head in a strange way that gave a remarkably dramatic impression of disappointment.

Colonel Carrington suddenly decided that he did not like this young man. He was too "sort of big and free and opinionated-like." But he was determined to make peace with Fred, and so he said: "I suppose what got me so peppery was because of my poor little Melissa. She feels it awfully—your playing free-and-loose with her affections this way—"

"Melissa!" Fred was astonished.

"Yes. She said she could scarcely believe her eyes when she saw you two love-making—"

"Oh!" Fred interrupted. "So it was Melissa who saw us and told you?"

The old gentleman did not respond in words, but his expression told Fred that he had guessed correctly. With this assurance a knowledge of many things seemed to come to young Pope. He was learning about women, and their ways, and a lot besides.

With an effort he made himself revert to the present situation. He attempted to recall the old man's exact words: "Playing free-and-loose with her affections," that was it.

"Colonel Carrington," he said soberly, although, as he continued, he felt a strong inclination to laugh, "I could not have played so very free-and-loose with your charming daughter's affections, because I have only had the pleasure of one talk with the lady, and that was while she sat in the wagon beside two elderly females and I rode outside. Even if I possessed the extraordinary *Don Juan* abilities, that you seem to credit me with, I could not have so deeply ensnared the lady, under the circumstances."

Fred spoke with sarcasm, but the old gentleman did not heed it. He looked somewhat relieved.

"Well, you never can tell about girls," he commented, "sometimes they are powerful quick on the trigger. Anyhow, Melissa liked you a whole lot—"

"Doesn't she—now?" Fred inquired with surprise.

"What difference can that make, man—after what has happened? Are you a bigamist? Surely you are going to ask Mary Ann to marry you?"

"Are you serious?" Fred demanded.

"Certainly." Colonel Carrington spoke with conviction. "Now don't let's get

angry again—I'm not asking any embarrassing questions. I would have gone just as far myself, in my young days, I guess. But, don't you think, to marry her is about the only straight thing to do?"

"Why, man alive!" Fred cried, "I don't even know that the young lady likes me, at all! You don't seem to think that she has any say in this matter!"

"Pooh!" Colonel Carrington incredulously exclaimed.

Like a stone between the eyes it hit young Pope that, after all he had said, the colonel placed the worst possible construction upon his innocent relations with the governess.

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)



When Liz Squealed

By Raber Mundorf

I.

"TAKE it from me! This is the *last* time I stake a big, husky bum like you to grub an' coin!"

The young woman's soiled kimonolike wrapper gaped slatternly at the neck, exposing a shoulder; telltale lines of dissipation marred a face redeemed only by the keenly intelligent eyes that flashed angrily through the snarl of disheveled hair, as she slouched forward with a certain lithe grace and slapped the sizzling contents of the frying-pan upon the plate of the man addressed.

"Bull" Quigg bent over his noontime breakfast. His neck reddened slightly—not from any sense of shame, but rather at being humiliated before the drabs and blotched-

faced, cadaverous-looking crooks who lounged about. Men usually did not stand for such talk from their girls in this notorious Allen Street tenement.

Making a show of imperturbable good humor, he stretched his legs comfortably under the small kitchen-table—the only stick of furniture, other than a few decrepit chairs, in all this barn of a room; then responded with attempted nonchalance:

"Wot's a little stake between pals, Liz? Anyways"—with sarcastic emphasis—"who staked *you*? Where'd yuh get the stove, the bacon, them eggs an' taters? Where'd yuh get all yer mazuma? Where'd yuh get them swell rags yuh got locked in the box? All them things don't grow on trees, *I* says."

"It's a cinch I didn't get 'em from *you*—

an' it's none o' your d—n business!" Liz saw no reason to explain that she had filched the food from the *bagania*, while the proprietor was busy selling strange Roumanian delicatessen to a bona-fide customer; that she also had "lifted," with her accustomed cleverness, the money to pay for the clothes, for the stove from Benjamin's, and its coal from the pushcart pedler.

Her retort provoked the crafty insinuation:

"Mebbe not from *me*—an' I guess not either from that guy, Finky Lotz, on the fourt' floor. *You* know, the guy wot's always pokin' his doity mug in at the door to see if I'm still around."

The girl, at first livid with fury, of an instant became singularly calm. Deliberately and with a grave curiosity, she measured him from head to foot. Her gaze took in the massive ox-frame of a physique which, together with his utter fearlessness of God or man or devil, had drawn her to Bull Quigg; but she now, was searching deeper than the outer man, and what she did or did not find caused her lips to curl in repugnance.

Bull read her silence as an admission of defeat. It afforded him grim satisfaction to note scant sympathy for Liz among the crooks, and especially the drabs. In truth, the girls knew Liz as "a good sort—who would give you the shirt off her back"; but they were a bit envious. "Stake" a "fella"? Why, *they* handed over every cent they earned to their fellas; and often were "beaten up" by way of thanks. Liz was too uppish, too independent for them; besides, she owned better clothes.

Thus encouraged, Bull lit his pipe and strolled to the window, where ~~he~~ he proceeded to air his grievance.

"Wot's come over yuh lately, Liz?" he demanded, in a tone of injury. "Ain't I took all kinds o' risks—even to croakin' a guy if necessary—to get yuh many a little present? It weren't my fault if yuh wouldn't accept of more.

"But you allus seemed to 'preciate 'em. An' up to late yuh didn't mind hockin' 'em or lendin' me a little kale when I strikes a bit o' bad luck. Now you ain't no pal no more. All yuh do is jaw, jaw, jaw!"

The girl apparently did not hear him.

This must be the doing of that rat, Finky Lotz, decided Bull. By looking into the rear court, he could see the tiny synagogue and Talmudic school, whose janitor once was Isaac Jacobs—the same man who, within twenty-four hours, slew his enemy, his wife and himself, thus effectively erasing the disturbing triangle.

Bull's sluggish imagination was proof against the suggestion; moreover, only his vanity was wounded. Nevertheless, he vowed he'd "get" that guy, Finky. He wasn't going to have Liz jawing at him like this all the time.

Turning the thought over in his mind, he reached for his coat and morosely stalked out.

Liz shortly roused herself from her abstraction, dismissing the matter with an angry jerk of her head; then started to go visit Granny Githens up-stairs.

The stairs ascended from the hallway outside. Liz had traversed half the length of the hall space, when she stopped short, at sound of voices from the landing below.

She leaned over the banister in time to see Meg Rundle swept into Bull Quigg's embrace. Some one doubtlessly came in at the tenement entrance, for the pair separated almost immediately.

"I thought so," murmured Liz, in bitter triumph. "First time I spots 'em might 've been an accident, but *twice* shows 'em up dead sure at their rotten game."

Curiously, as she mounted the steps Liz seemed not jealous, but infinitely scornful.

Liz resided on the second floor, Granny on the fourth of this old brick building which had been converted into a "one-room" tenement—such as the slums of old London know. By the simple expedient of removing partitions—which merely occupied valuable rental space—each floor was transformed into a single large dwelling-room. More tenants could be accommodated; more dollars accrue to the landlord.

Fastidious folk would scarcely rejoice in home facilities offered upon such a highly communal basis. But "privacy" is appreciated only where it is understood; there is no such word in Allen Street's jargon.

Liz poked her head through the door of

the fourth-floor "room," and descried Granny lying upon her bed on the floor, the mattress against the moldy wall, from which crumbling plaster fell.

Ordinarily the blind, old woman was outside peddling shoe-laces to provide support for herself and her precious young scamp of a grandson. At times, however, her old enemy, rheumatism, "took" her, and she was bedridden for days.

"Hello, Gran! How's the rheumatiz?" the girl called.

A wail of lamentation, in the old woman's croaking voice, greeted her ears.

II.

"I AST my boy Jim to git me a paper o' snuff," Granny Githens haltingly explained.

"Of course he says he ain't got no money. So I reaches under me mat—I mean where I keeps it. 'En he snatches me little roll an' skips with it all—an' I ain't seen hide nor hair of 'im since.

"With me little savin's gone, an' the ache in me poor bones, an' me half dead fer the want of a pinch o' snuff! Ow! Ow! The curse of the devil is on me sure! An ongrateful boy, Jimmy is."

Cutting in ahead of another lacrimose outburst, Liz said severely: "He oughta hang. But I guess bygoness in this case is bygoness, right enough.

"Try to start forgettin' yer coin, Gran, while I go for yer snuff.

"Wot a rotten bunch this is!" she commented, for the first time in her varied career, as she went down the stairs.

Going south on Allen Street, she paused in front of the Russian antique and copper and brass shop of M. Zaffe, to watch musingly the well-to-do "swells" who were descending into this basement home of curios. She saw the old artist—the *master*—with his shaggy beard and angry, suspicious eyes, come impatiently from his work, wearing his leather-apron, and mallet still in hand, to greet these customers.

Evidently they showed proper respect and intelligent appreciation of his art; for soon he was revealing to them wonderful treasures in hammered copper and brass, and in bent metalwork and grill wrought almost as fine and as delicate as filigree.

Samovars, seven-branched candelabra, fire sets, reliquaries, torches, braziers, tall, slender vases with lily-calyx mouths, plaques, shields, brass-bound lanterns; pots, jugs, ewers—every piece a prize—scarce to be matched for excellence of craftsmanship, and perhaps not to be surpassed.

Liz had heard reports of the extraordinary prices that patrons had paid ungrudgingly for some of this "junk." It occurred to her that it might be worth "lifting." She would bear it in mind. Her funds were virtually gone—most of her clothes had been pawned; she had not had the heart for "work" lately. She must get busy.

And then came to Liz perhaps the strangest thought that ever had entered her mind. She wondered why she had no eye for the beauties of this junk, such as the swells possessed. To her, if lucky enough to make a "swipe," it meant only a medium of exchange for clothes and food, and—emphatically—drink. Maybe it was "pretty"—yet—she'd never think of *keeping* it.

The problem still was perplexing her when, having gone around the corner to the Gambetta Snuff-Shop—patronized chiefly by the neighboring tailors, she had bought Granny's snuff and was returning through Allen Street.

She gazed thoughtfully at a maid of the Ghetto, who proudly wore a "sumptuous" fur coat over a tattered dress, and whose head was bare—according to the Allen Street mode. Beyond, admiring fabrics in the Arabian Lace-Shop, stood a shabbily clad old woman, head and shoulders swathed in shawls; beside her a granddaughter—a fashion-plate of "up-to-date" style. Liz knew, without thinking, that the street was alive with such contracts.

Somehow she realized that these immigrants—or daughters of immigrants—were striving to grow up and away from the ruck and muck of Allen Street, while she deliberately had come down to *hide* in its foulest corners. A vague dissatisfaction stirred within her.

Liz was about to enter the brick tenement when she caught sight of Mrs. Morrissey making hurriedly for the dwelling next door. She seemed to be carrying a bottle of medicine.

"Wot's become of little Mickey?" Liz asked quickly.

"He's sick, poor baby."

"Oh, could I see him—for just one minute, Mrs. Morrissey?" Liz cried impulsively, then bit her lip.

The old Irishwoman was proud. It was not so long ago that she had indignantly hid little four-year-old Mickey behind her skirts when Liz had made advances with a lollypop toward the child. But exclusiveness is impossible in Allen Street.

Soon Liz and the youngster were sharing the window delights of the Russian and Turkish tobacco-shop beneath the brick tenement; together pointing out the funny fez atop the mound of granulated tobacco, the long cigarette-holders that just seemed made for bubble-blowing, and the pretty pictures of cases, camels and houris on the gorgeous, enameled or lacquered cigarette-cases. Mrs. Morrissey at last had become resigned to it.

Now she hesitated, but softened by her affliction and Liz's eager appeal, she gave a doubtful consent.

"Mr. Morrissey is down sick, too," she said anxiously, as they went up the steps.

Liz murmured her sympathy, remembering Pat Morrissey as a fixture at Birsch's Stable, which stood next to the garage that incongruously displayed the sign of a veterinary. Pat had been employed at the stable years before Birsch owned it, but had become so attached to the place that he would not leave it or the neighborhood—much as he and his wife disliked "foreigners."

"'Tis the truth," Mrs. Morrissey continued, "I wouldn't 'a' knowed what to do, wid me mon an' baby both sick on me hands, if the good priest, Father Mahon, hadn't helped me wid money f'r the medicine an' sich."

Liz did not stay long. The child was delirious, and Pat inclined to abusive language at sight of the visitor. Liz drew the mother into the hallway.

"For Mickey," she whispered, pressing a wad of bills into Mrs. Morrissey's hand.

The old Irishwoman stepped back stiffly—horrified protest in her eyes.

"Rest easy," was the dry reassurance; "th' money came only from them wot could

afford it"—and Liz slipped down the stairs before Mrs. Morrissey could utter a word.

Very shortly the girl was listening to the mumbled complaints of Granny Githens.

"Sorry, Gran, that I couldn't get back sooner," Liz apologized.

The old woman started laboriously to raise herself, in order that she might take her snuff and her sneeze sitting up. As Liz stooped to help, she caught a glimpse of what looked like the edge of a piece of green paper sticking out from beneath the mattress.

A quick movement of her practised fingers—and when she stood erect she was silently turning over a number of bills. Obviously, when Granny had pulled out her roll in front of Jim some of the bills had stuck to the mattress.

Liz almost cried out. Fifty dollars! What must the old woman's original roll have been? Why, the old crone had been *rich*! No poor person had a right to all this money.

"Fifty dollars!" the girl repeated to herself, while the rheumatic old woman sneezed cautiously but luxuriously. What couldn't *she* do with fifty dollars just now—when she didn't own a copper! And Granny, back at her thriving trade in a day or so, would soon recoup her losses.

Her hand clutched feverishly about the money. Then—

"Here, Gran, is some bills I just found by yer mattress. I guess they belong to you," she said, finding, in the struggle with herself, that she could no more keep the money than she could steal coppers from the cup of the blind, old Russian who sold burbling bird-whistles on the corner of Grand Street, than she could run away with the toys and gimcracks peddled by the little man with the shrunken legs at Delancey.

The old woman grabbed the money and clutched it to her bosom, uttering hysterical croaks of joy.

"Lemme pay fer the snuff, Liz!" she finally exclaimed. But Liz had gone.

Back in her own room, deserted save for a few heavily sleeping occupants of crude beds of straw or bagging, Liz sat hunched over the kitchen-table.

She felt worn out, discontented, discouraged, tired of it all.

She thought irrelevantly of little "Happy"—her other name was Floss—who had lived in the near-by tenement with the high iron stoop, under which the junk-dealer jammed his twisted, rusty scrap. Happy, too, had become "tired," and had gone down to the East River and stepped off a pier.

Liz rose impatiently and walked about the room. Presently it dawned upon her that she had forgotten to eat that day, and she rummaged about, discovering several fragments of bacon and a few potatoes.

The potatoes were browning, and she had just dropped in the bacon when, watching the pan absentmindedly, she felt an arm encircle her waist and heard Finky Lotz's voice in her ear:

"Ah, cutie! Gi' us a kiss?"

The girl thrust the man away, gripped the pan, whirled—and the inside of the heavy iron frying-pan crashed down on the rat's head. He went spinning to the floor—a hideous spectacle, blood streaming down his face and the flesh seared and scalded by the boiling grease. Soon he "came to," and, screaming in agony, clutched at the boards and crawled and pulled himself toward the door.

"Shame to spoil all this good bacon," Liz was saying calmly, looking ruefully at the greasy fragments lying among the spat-terings of red.

III.

THE bells in the old gray church-tower on Rutgers Street softly chimed the hour—which meant supper-time for some folks; but seven o'clock and nothing else for Bull Quigg.

What use to go home, when Liz would only rag him for still being broke and out of luck! There seemed *less* reason for standing here on the corner, with the cold wet seeping into his shoes and the sleet stinging the tips of his ears. Yet Bull knew of no groggery or beanery that would welcome joyously a down-and-outer who lacked the "price."

Even the Gothic windows of this old "gospel house"—murky panes close-netted

with wire against the urchins' careless aim—seemed, in his morbid fancy, to be frowning a gross inhospitality down upon him. Why a strictly non-churchgoer should have resented this is not clear.

Nestling his chin deeper into the folds of his sweater and drawing his coat-collar more snugly about him, Bull cogitated rabidly upon the futility of things in general and of churches in particular.

"Wot in 'ell is a church good for?" he grouched. Warming to his theme: "T'ink o' the coin wasted! W'y, it's rooinous w'en yuh t'inks how many hot-shots o' whisky one collection would buy at—"

Somewhere in the far inner recesses of Bull's memory there stirred a faint remembrance. After all, maybe some church—this church, for instance—might be good for something. He'd find out.

The church appeared deserted, and in less than no time Bull Quigg was rifling the poor-box of its contents. "Chicken feed," mostly. The parishioners in this East Side neighborhood could spare little; indeed, they had given more than they could well afford. The poor always are good to the poor.

Bull disgustedly dropped handful after handful of the coppers, nickels and dimes temporarily into his pockets. He was planning the grub and "booze" he would have for a starter when—

"You wretched thief! This money's not for the likes of you; 'tis for the honest an' deservin'!"

Bull wheeled swiftly, hand at hip. Then, scrutinizing the puny frame of the snowy-haired old sexton, he leered and said cynically, lightly:

"'S all right; I'm just holdin' it in trust for th' honest poor an' needy."

Ready to depart, he moved forward with that intention. But the little old man persisted in blocking his path.

"G'wan now, granpop!" the thug warned.

Still the doddering old fellow kept plucking at Bull's coat and pockets. Bull Quigg began to feel annoyed. He shoved the gray-beard away. The feeble old fool ought to know better. He must know that he could brain him with one crack.

Back again tottered the sexton, shrilling

righteous denunciation in his thin, quavering old voice and plucking more determinedly at the thug's pockets.

Bull Quigg reached out his great paw in irritation, grasped his tormentor by the throat. The little old man kept plucking, though now at Bull's fingers, and Bull angrily pressed—hard. When he thought to loosen his grip, he could not repress a whistle of astonishment.

"W'y, I hardly touches 'im," he muttered, looking down at what seemed a shapeless little bundle of clothes at his feet, grumbling aggrievedly: "W'y couldn't th' old fool behave hisself!"

Swearing at the bother the old man's obstinacy was causing him, Bull Quigg, after a sharp survey, emerged from the church. He was scurrying west on Henry Street when the commanding figure of Patrolman Cafferty loomed up through the dense veil of driving, blinding sleet. The thug dived unceremoniously into "Cheap Morris's" soft-drink shop.

When the officer had passed, Bull breathed much more freely, too relieved to note the dark-faced little Jewess's keen observation of his furtive manner, his bulging pockets and the handful of chicken feed, from which he picked out a coin to pay for the distasteful swallow of grape-juice. She knew Bull Quigg and followed with meditative eyes his hasty exit.

By the time he had gained Division Street Bull's nervousness had vanished. Still, as a matter of form, he wanted to establish an alibi.

"Me for the Casino," he said to himself, remembering that the social and dance of "The Red Circle" was being held at the hall this evening.

With that, Bull Quigg plunged into the appalling blackness of Allen Street, where the bulkily, obtruding L, sprawled over its entire length, clamps down upon the street proper like a snuffer over a candle.

This narrow highway, sometimes called the "most horrible street in New York," also qualifies as a "petticoat lane"; with its incredibly congested manufactories of petticoats, kimonos, sacks, brassières and more intimate items of ladies' wear. Mere tenement rooms they are, chiefly, where

not so long ago, admitting progress, whirled from early morning until far into night the sewing-machines of the cruelest sweatshops in the world.

Yet the multitudinous lights of these "factories"—including thinly disguised sweatshops and "contractors"—mercilessly driving their slaving toilers in defiance of hours, "overtime," standard pay by the piece, and union labelers—seemed but to intensify the gloom; breeding only sickly shadows that made more terrible the vast inky splotch of darkness.

Little light could be expected from the swarm-inhabited black tenement-dwellings above the double tiers of shops—factory or jobbers' offices and retail stores below. Light cost money.

Bull Quigg much preferred, however, to move in darkness.

He passed Grand Street and crossed over the rough paving-blocks to the Casino.

Soon his fascinated eyes and ears were drinking in the dance of the Reds: the mad kaleidoscope of spinning, leaping, whirling bodies; the girls' flying, tousled tresses and the flashing colors of furbelows; the wild music of the red-trousered, white-frilled Czech orchestra hired for the occasion.

Anarchists and Bolsheviks the girls might be, but they were undeniably pretty. His judgment was confirmed by the presence of his friend, dapper "Sheeny" Latnikoff. This bird of prey divided his time, for professional purposes, between movies like the New Grand Theater, where girls were pretty but often free from intellect, and dances such as this, where girls were pretty but often gave dangerous freedom to much too active intellect.

"Soitenly, Bull, we'll fix yuh up the niftiest alibi yuh ever seen," promised Sheeny, when the thug had made known his errand.

A few pals were called, the alibi was framed, and Bull showed himself conspicuously about the hall.

He admired the dance and the girls for a while, then hunger and a decided thirst outvying the arts of Terpsichore, he took his leave. Dining to repletion at Meliowich's Oriental Kitchen, which specialized in "famous Roumanian broilings," he sauntered

over to Wiener's; there procuring two bottles of whisky and fortifying himself with several direct slugs of the "primest."

His thirst quenched for the moment, his stomach filled, and his mind at ease regarding the alibi, the thug and gunman departed for the one-room tenement, near Hester Street, the tenement identified by the police as that which housed the worst crowd of disreputables in all Allen Street.

IV.

"WHERE'S Liz?" bawled Bull Quigg.

A slattern stretched on a nondescript pile of dirty bedding close by raised herself on elbow and stared at him out of stupid eyes. "Up-stairs, coddlin' Bess Lane, wot's seein' things," she said thickly.

That suited Bull. After that morning's set-to, he didn't look forward with any very pleasurable anticipation to his girl's greeting. His only consolation was that anyway he wouldn't have to brace her for a meal.

Stumping to the table, Bull plunked down his bottles, thus signifying to all who had ears that he was setting up the drinks.

With one accord all the young "dopes," and crooks—and the girls who didn't happen to be out—flocked to help him guzzle.

Presently Liz entered, taking in the scene at a glance.

"Wot luck?" she asked coolly.

Bull felt a little easier at this sign of truce in active hostilities.

"Rotten," he confessed, adding that he had been over to Joe's—a gunmen's hang-out on Madison Street—about a job, but times were slack.

"Since when the gunman stuff, Bull?" the girl inquired, with ominous quietness. "Why not yer own trade?"

"Nobody 'll woik wit' me, that's w'y!" bellowed the ex-housebreaker sullenly. "After I got sent up, an' came back, one or two little jobs goes wrong. Me pals blames it on me—says I lost me noive; an' now waves me the goo'-by. It's no good woikin' single.

"Seems to me yer gettin' some pertic'lar, all of a suddint," he muttered truculently.

"A guy usin' a jimmy or a can o' soup is goin' about his own business—an' if any one butts in, it's their lookout," Liz softly

observed. "Anyhow, a man wit' brains dodges killin's, except when necessary.

"But gunnin' for a guy that hasn't got a chanst to come back—an' for a measly ten-spot or so—why, that's—that's some different. I thought you was a *real* fighter, Bull!"

"I gotta live, ain't I?" was the thug's surly reply. He felt the girl's hard, speculative scrutiny upon him. It made him uncomfortable; and he sought relief in the bottle. But the liquid supply had been exhausted.

"The drinks is on me," he announced brusquely. "Annie the Sniff can go rush 'em from th' corner."

He drew a bandanna bundle from about his person, untied it and dumped a mound of small coins—chicken feed—on the table.

"Git back! Git back!" he growled, as the crooks and drabs edged closer.

"'Twas for the poor," he explained in disgust, recounting his exploit; "an' bein' poor as 'n alley-tom meself, I figgers this cheap swag belonged to me, though an old gray-haired guy didn't seem to t'ink so till I puts 'im to sleep for keeps."

The crowd roared their laughter, the girls a little less spontaneously and boisterously than their fellas, who twitted Bull upon his piking haul, as he methodically retied the bandanna after extracting the coins he needed.

Liz alone remained silent, staring intently at Bull.

The door opened unexpectedly and "Dopey" Greensy slid in, closing it tightly behind him.

"Anybody wanted?" he asked quickly. "Tracy and a coupla odder bulls is comin' troo th' front door."

Bull Quigg lurched out of his chair with an oath. By some strange presentiment he *knew* who was wanted.

He dare not risk the stairs leading to the upper floors and the devious ways across the roofs, inasmuch as a run to the outside stairway likely would land him in the bulls' arms. Likewise, the front fire-escape would be under their guns.

He staggered toward the rear window—his only other avenue of escape. But Liz had forestalled him. "You can't! There's

a bull down there, too!" she cautioned. She pushed Bull through the wash that hung on a clothes-line zigzagging across a far corner of the room. He reeled into a large closet mainly built into the wall, and Liz turned the key after him.

Once inside the fugitive applied his palms to a side of the closet. It slid outward in its grooves—revealing a niche in the wall, just roomy enough to hide a man standing upright, his back flattened against the bricks behind him. There was nothing else peculiar about the closet, except that it was entirely lined with wood—like an old-fashioned wardrobe; and that one floor-board could be moved by a person who knew the trick and who had something to conceal beneath it. Ragged, mildewed garments hung from the hooks.

Bull would have been puzzled by the expression on his girl's face, as she stood there, breathing hard. Her eyes seemed to be trying to pierce through the planking of the closet.

"We want Bull Quigg!" was the curt announcement of one of the three plain-clothes men from headquarters.

The cadaverous-faced young crooks dropped their heads; the girls closely studied the walls. If you live in a one-room tenement it is not wise to impress your "mug" too strongly on a cop's memory, or to remind him too often of you.

A swift examination—a poking through the wretched bedding—then an officer, with a quick, alert motion, parted the screen of drying clothes at the corner of the room.

He saw Liz, and he and a companion dodged through the wash.

They repeated their inquiry. The girl

made a surly, evasive answer in a loud tone; then bent secretively toward a "cop"—who defensively raised the butt of his revolver. A drab once had bitten a chunk out of his ear. But Liz, hidden from her associates by the screen of drying garments, merely desired to whisper.

The officer looked at her curiously, afterward toward the closet to which she had pointed.

From the secret compartment of the closet they dragged Bull Quigg, almost too astonished to struggle.

"S'long, Liz," he muttered chokingly, sullen and mystified as they took him away.

"S'long, Bull," she said quietly.

When the trio and their prisoner stepped to the sidewalk, the thug asked: "Where's th' odder cop?"

"What other?" cheerfully responded one of the officers to whom he was manacled.

Then Bull cursed long and volubly. How had Liz come to make such a fatal error? How could she see a cop in the back yard when there wasn't any? And what—what about that closet!

Bull Quigg's girl peered through a queer little shuttered aperture cut into the one-room tenement's front retaining wall, between the two more conventional windows, and watched the party until it had melted into the blackness of Allen Street.

"The ——— doity skunk, to rob a poor-box! I might 've stood anything but *that*!" she gritted, in a voice quivering with utter contempt.

Liz, who never had been inside a church in all her life, who deemed "necessary" murder nothing to make a fuss about—Liz, too, had her code.

JUST A FEW OF NEXT WEEK'S SHORT STORIES

"Knuckled"

BY CHIEF HENRY RED EAGLE

"Beyond the Law"

BY HENRY LEVERAGE —and—

"The Quality of Mercy"

BY MARY E. WORTS

"Mitts Across the Sea"

BY STEPHEN ALLEN REYNOLDS

"THE HOUSE ON SILVER STREET"

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE

BY FRANCIS JAMES

The Hammer

by John Frederick

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

TAKING up the cause of Matteo Gaddi, Florentine money-lender, against Henry of Gilford, Peter Warburton, sword-maker, with a talent for drawing, worsted his adversary, the price of his aid being a wonderful medallion of Beatrice della Marca, in which he evinced a remarkable interest.

Peter spared Gilford, the latter being at his mercy, and returning to his house was again intrigued with the medallion, which he sketched over and over. Failing to kill Gilford, he borrowed the medallion for six months from Matteo at the usurious rate of twenty pounds, and being introduced by Gilford—with whom he had become friendly—to Salviati, a master sculptor, he worked with the latter for a time, displaying unusual genius. But when he had finally fashioned a model of the medallion, which elicited the admiration of Salviati himself, the clay was irretrievably ruined through an accident. Peter, in despair, gave over his new work, and took to the tavern; and it was while returning home one bitter night, the worse for drink, that he came upon the girl, Sonia, in the snow.

Peter saved her life, and she proved his inspiration, silent and strange as she was, for he returned again to Salviati. "Look to the study of woman," said the master, "if you would endue your marbles with the spark of genius." Peter set himself to the task; but his work, while wonderful, seemed somehow to fall short of the genius of true inspiration. All the while he studied Sonia, but could make nothing of her; her strange silence, her queer moods, her accent, harsh and rough, yet of a curious sweetness.

And then, one night, he wakened to hear a soft sound, and he found her weeping silently.

"What ails you, Sonia?" he asked.

She sobbed for the first time aloud.

"God's body!" he growled. "What is it, girl?"

CHAPTER XI.

PETER LEARNS AND UNLEARNS.

SONIA pressed both hands against the base of her throat, and her head raised very slowly until her eyes, tear-brimmed and wide, rested upon him with a great appeal.

"I cannot tell," she said; "I only know that I feel lonely. It came over me from the sweet night which I have been breathing and watching until a hurt came inside me. Peter, it is like the scent of the flowers which they pile around a man who has died young."

Her arm flashed as she gestured toward the city without. He marveled at the tremor of her body, and he marveled again at the slender whiteness of her arm.

"The night?" he repeated vaguely. "It is warm. It is sleepy. What else, Sonia?"

"Look out again, and listen with your heart!"

She drew him forward to the window and leaned far out, supporting herself with a hand on his shoulder. She turned a lighted face to him.

"Do you hear? Do you feel? Do you understand, Peter?"

He listened with all his force; he watched with intent eyes. Far away, past the roofs of groveling huts lower than his own house, he saw the calm and silver Thames. The moon touched through the gloom of night distant spires which gleamed against the sky like threatening spear-points. Between the river and the lofty towers stretched the dark heart of the city.

This story began in *The Argosy* for March 1.

To this he bent his ear, and heard a murmur which increased as the ticking of a clock grows out of nothingness. Into this murmur entered many different sounds; he thought he heard faint laughter, distant voices, and the tremor of music.

Peter looked up to the large circle of the moon, new risen and still faintly touched with the sunset gold. The sadness, like the breath of funeral flowers, made an uneasy coldness in his blood. He looked for explanation to Sonia.

Her eyes had never left his face. Now they lighted with something akin to triumph.

"And this has made you sad?" he asked. "It is strange, Sonia. I see the city with new eyes, and hear it with new ears. It is beautiful, and yet I do not wonder that you weep. There is a female weakness even in me."

She said: "I have thought of mine own country that lies far east and far north across many mountains and seas and broad rivers. There the winter is gone, and all the snow has passed from the hills. The same moon which sees us looks down on the village in the valley, where they walk the streets and let the fires go out for the first time in many months.

"The old people sit at the doorways. The young men pass up and down in groups. They are gaily dressed. Sometimes they sing together, but so softly that they do not break the silence. Nothing breaks that, not even the laughter of the girls. They run here and there.

"One of them—ah, how clear I see her!—she has caught a yellow wildflower between her teeth, and there is a red blossom in her dark hair, and a gay mantle floats from her shoulders. The youths pursue her, and she defies them with her voice and invites them with her eyes. But her laughter, it is pure crystal, like the bubbling of water."

"Where is this land, Sonia?" Peter asked.

"You could travel a month and a week and a day on fast horses and never reach it."

"Then why do you tell me of it?"

"Oh, blind, blind! Can you not see the valley—the stir of music and the sound

of voices in the streets? The old people at the doors, with dim-eyed smiles and wrinkled hands folded in their laps, remembering such moments in their youth? They look up over the roofs of the village to the black hills, and there, between the earth and the white sky, pace the cattle like shadows—hark! There is the lowing of a cow, far away—"

She had grown more excited as she described the scene. Now she turned to Peter, draped in the sheet like a Roman in his toga, with his dark face frowning puzzled curiosity upon her. The eagerness passed from her face and left only the sorrow.

"Keep the thoughts away from me—for I am weak and sick at heart when I think of it all!"

An impulse of pity, and perhaps of something more than pity, made him reach out a hand toward the silken mass of hair. It shimmered and flashed before his touch.

"Here is a marvel chanced," he said. "You have made me sad likewise."

She caught her breath, and seemed to be listening for his next word.

"Sad?" she asked.

"But I would not change this sadness to be as happy as the day."

Her lips parted as she watched his face.

"What? Shall I tell you more of it?"

"Yes, Peter," she whispered.

"I know not what to say. I feel as if I had drunken a strange wine that left me cold at heart, and yet glad."

"Ah!"

"What? Is it in yours likewise, Sonia?"

"Yes! Wine—and cold—and a quick, light beat like a pulse of music."

"Even so," nodded Peter, and he sighed. "I have never in my life felt this! For I am both weak and glad!"

"Is it all because of the night, Peter?"

"I cannot tell."

"Is it all from the faint noises and the whiteness of the moon, Peter?"

"Nay, I cannot be sworn to it, but I think it is partly from the touch of thee, Sonia, and the softness of your arms—and the red-gold fire of your hair!"

Her lips seemed to frame a word, but they ended in pale silence.

"You are cold!" he said. "I shall wrap you warm, Sonia."

"No, no! I am glad—glad at heart, and warm—warm at heart. Oh, Peter, I have served you ill, for I have striven to make you happy, but my tongue is cursed with silence!"

"Hush, Sonia! You are ill, child. It is for your home, I know. Listen! I have no great store of gold, but what I have is yours. It will take you back across the seas and the rivers and the mountains to your home."

Her head drooped, and then she glanced up to him with a smile that made him start.

"There! I have made thee happy, girl! What? It shall all be yours—all that I have and some that I may borrow. You shall go home to those village streets and the gay youths."

"And you," she murmured—"you will go, likewise?"

"I? Thunder of God, child, why should I take such a journey? Body of me, it is not *my* home!"

She caught one hand to her face with a soft moan.

"Sweet virgin," breathed Peter, "stay in that wise but a moment. I shall run and fetch my crayons and paper. That posture—that perfect white arm—that flood of glorious hair—"

"Stop! My breath goes—I—I cannot breathe—"

"Nay, I was wrong to let you stand so in this cool wind. I will—"

"Go!" she commanded. She caught him by the shoulder and half pushed, half dragged him from her room.

Wholly unprepared for this outbreak, Peter staggered back through the curtained entrance. She stood a moment there with a clenched hand raised.

"Are you mad? Have I hurt you, Sonia?"

"Ah, I hate you!" she cried.

After he had lighted a lantern he stood for a moment frowning and shaking his head. This must be entered in his book of knowledge.

"Woman hath no reason," he wrote. "If she is sad, let no one comfort her, or she

will turn upon him in rage and drive him from her. If she is glad, let no one rejoice with her, or her gladness will be turned into sorrow.

"Why were these creatures ever created? Or since men must have mothers, why did not God give women intelligence? I shall strive no more to understand them. To this, only a prophet could aspire."

Yet, before he went back to his bed, he took crayon and paper and sketched with quick lines her figure as she stood leaning against the window. Still shaking his head, he retreated to the comfort of his blankets.

Peter was almost asleep when something leaned above his bed. He waited, holding his breath. The object leaned closer. Lips touched his forehead lightly, and the dim figure retreated. He lay a long moment, pondering.

"After all," he muttered, "I must erase what I have written in the book!"

The next morning he watched her narrowly, but she betrayed no consciousness of his presence. He might have been an animated mechanism, for all the heed she gave him. For his part, he had no time to wonder long over so trivial an affair. His art claimed him, and he gave himself to it with his usual furious energy. To be sure, he once recounted this strange scene to Lionardo Salviati, attempting to prove thereby the fallacy of the sculptor's praise of women.

The Italian listened to the end, his keen little eyes twinkling from time to time. When the tale was done, he burst into a great roar of laughter.

"Aye," growled Peter, "they are things to laugh at, but naught more."

Salviati clapped a hand upon his pupil's shoulder, still laughing heartily.

"Pietro," he said, wiping the tears from his eyes, "you are a tall fellow, but a great booby as well!"

"I?" queried Peter, ready to take offense.

"Never scowl at me!" answered Salviati good-naturedly; and then more gravely: "Ah, lad, it takes a villain to know a woman, and you are a heart of gold!"

With this he went off to his sketching-board and left Peter gaping after him.

"Villain or not," said Peter at last, "I shall learn their secret in the end, though it prove the death of me!"

And he picked up his hammer and chisel to make a furious assault upon a block of stone.

Such a program of endless work, thought, and work again began to tell sadly on him as the spring advanced toward summer. The great appetite, which had been nourished by herculean labors at his forge during the previous years, now fell off. He grew thin. His eyes sank deeper among telltale shadows. He slept brokenly, and in the evening, when he returned from the work place of Salvati, there were many times when he drowsed over his sketch-board.

On such an evening he roused to the sound of heavy footsteps racing up his stairs. The footfall pounded loudly across his floor. As he raised his head, still heavy with sleep, his shoulder was seized and shaken rudely.

"What in the fiend's name?" roared Peter, and he rose with balled fist and threatening brow to confront Lord Henry of Gilford.

His lordship's cloak fluttered behind him from one shoulder; his red velvet hat with the white feather sat awry upon his long hair, and the rest of his clothes were troubled in proportion.

"Right!" he gasped, and flung himself into a chair. "In the fiend's name, and those of all the lesser devils! I am gladder to be in your house, Peter Warburton, than in the king's palace!"

Peter gazed upon this apparition in a stupor, but the surprise swiftly chased the sleep from his brain. He crossed to the wall, and without a word slipped off his doublet, put on a coat of mail, and, having replaced his doublet, belted a heavy sword on. This done, he slipped a steel-lined hat on his head and returned to Gilford, who sat watching his movements with an appreciative eye.

"Why, Warburton, good fellow," he said warmly, rising and taking Peter's hand in a great grasp, "would you go out to fight all of London without learning even the names of those who are my enemies?"

Peter extricated his hand with some embarrassment.

"I hunt no quarrels," he said; "but now that I think on it, I have not drawn a sword since—"

He stopped, flushing deeply.

"Since you battered me on head and body," smiled Gilford, "till I thought the devil himself had sent thee after me. Never blush for it! All true men have heavy hands. But the cause of this flight of mine—"

"You have gained your breath again," said Peter gravely. "If you lack mail—Look you! Here's a strong cuirass that should fit you. Let us down to the street again and hunt the curs!"

Lord Gilford broke into a fit of laughter.

"Think no more of it now, friend Peter," he answered; "and as for fighting my foe—I had as soon fight the king himself. It is the fat devil of a cardinal himself!"

Peter still looked blank.

CHAPTER XII.

PETER MAKES AN OATH.

"**W**OLSEY, perdition singe him!" explained Lord Gilford. "I did but tickle the inwards of an insolent knave of his household with my sword, and he must needs get him a warrant from the king and hunt me through the streets with a band of armed ruffians. Ha! They came on me by surprise, and one of the villains drove a cloth-yard shaft into my horse. I escaped without hurt from the fall, beat down two of the rascals who stood in my path, and gave my heels wings.

"They followed hard after me. One of the scoundrels ran like a greyhound. I heard him panting at my back, but managed to turn and cut him shrewdly across the crown. After that they held more aback. I turned to the right and left, here and there; and as I ran, hearing their clamor die out behind me, I bethought me of what place wherein I could find safety.

"On my soul, I know lords and barons enough, and poor men as well, but never a one who would not have sold my hide and his honor to win the favor of the fat car-

dinal. Then I remembered you, friend Peter, and came for your house like a bird. Ale first, and we'll talk of remedies later. What—"

He stopped off short, staring. Peter followed the direction of his eyes, and saw Sonia at the farther side of the room, where the dim lantern light barely reached to her. Gilford leaned to him with a faint smile.

"Tell me — wife? Sister? Mistress? What?"

Peter started to answer, but found that the choice of terms offered him was not sufficient. He began to speak, but ended stammering.

"Never a word more," said Gilford, with a knowing air. "Why, man, you're blushing like a girl! I think none the less of you for it! Come hither, lass, and I'll cross your palm with gold and silver both!"

She answered, as Peter expected, nothing. He touched Gilford hastily on the arm.

"Peace!" he commanded. "She is nothing that you think, but—"

He stopped again.

"But?" smiled Gilford.

"She is—a lady—who lives under my protection," said Peter unsteadily, and, his frown challenged any further question.

"No more of it," answered the other; "but—she has the eyes of a tigress, Peter, and the hair of a goddess! Is she a tame beast and a human divinity, my friend?"

"Sonia," called Peter, by way of proof, "will you bring us a pitcher of ale and two tankards?"

She drew the ale from the barrel at the corner of the room and brought it to the table. As she advanced into the light, Gilford watched her with eyes which grew momentarily rounder. He rose and bowed, sweeping his hat down until it fairly brushed the floor.

"Lady," he said, "I have been loose of tongue, for the dark deceived me; but your silence is punishment enough!"

For she regarded him with her emotionless stare, and withdrew in the same silence to a little distance, where she sat down on a stool as if to await any further orders. Gilford turned to the sword-maker.

8 ARGOSY

"You are in luck!" he said breathlessly. "What a glorious beauty, Peter!"

"Beauty?" queried Peter. "Why, she's comely enough."

He waved the thought of her aside.

"What danger do you lie under now, Lord Henry?"

"You're an odd fellow," returned Gilford, regarding him with twinkling but uncertain eyes for a moment. "However, let's forget titles from henceforth. I am Harry Gilford, so please you, and you are my good companion Peter Warburton. My title makes part of my danger now."

He tossed out both hands and laughed.

"I feel as if I had cast five hundred-weight from my shoulders. That title will have a graceless sound in England by the morrow, for Wolsey will have poisoned the ear of the king. Aye, and now that I think on it, you fall under the same peril as long as you shelter me. Na! I had not thought of that!"

He rose.

"Farewell, Peter; I shall find out another refuge, and—"

But Peter blocked his way to the stairs.

"You shall not stir a foot," he said, "were he thrice a cardinal and had the ear of three kings. Here's my kingdom within these four walls, and God help the man who brings another law than mine inside them!"

"There spoke Merry England," said Gilford, heaving a sigh of relief. "If you will have it so, God knows I'm glad of it."

He resumed his seat.

"But how of the girl, Peter?" This in a lower voice. "Will she not carry tidings? The streets around must be still full of the cardinal's hunting hounds. If she gave them the word—"

"Put that from your mind," said Peter. "I will answer for her honor as I would for a man's."

Gilford regarded her somewhat askance.

"That is more than I would say for half the great ladies of England," he said. "However, I trust her for your sake. I have run myself out of breath and out of mind. Tell me where lies the Thames from here."

"I will take you there when you like. I can show you it from the window yonder."

"No need now. The morrow will serve my turn. But beyond that I must not linger in England, for they will search every vessel that sails from the ports."

"Whither are you bound?" asked Peter.

"Italy," answered Gilford. "Blue skies, bright suns, fair ladies, and old wine—Italy! One word to spell them all!"

"Salviati!" cried Peter.

"Aye," queried Gilford, "what of the fat stone-worker? But hold! I forget that your mystery is the same as his!"

"He would sell his hopes of heaven for a return to that land," said Peter; "and who would not? He has told me much of it. Bright skies, warm suns, old wines, I doubt now—but likewise beauty grows there on every tree. Florence—"

"A shining city, Peter."

"Sculpture is revered, and all the arts. Dukes and counts and cardinals, says Salviati, hang over the shoulder of the artist while he works, and praise or blame each movement of his hand. And Rome—"

Gilford kissed his hand to the air.

"Rome!" he cried. "The crown of the universe." He grew serious. "If you love Italy so well, Peter, why not up, bag and baggage, and go with me? If you will still labor over mummeries in stone, Italy's the place for you!"

"Go to Italy?" repeated Peter, rapt, and smiling vaguely into the air. "It is a dream I cannot hope for! There I should see Beatrice!"

Sonia started and listened intently.

"Beatrice della Marca!" said Peter. "It was her portrait which made me work in stone. If I looked into her face, who knows what I might not perform?"

"No better reason in the world," said Gilford; "and here's a cause for traveling that any man would understand—if he had seen the Della Marca. For they say—"

"My work—my house," brooded Peter. "I must at least stay to sell these. Yet if I sell them, what will become of Sonia—"

He looked around. She was not in the room.

"Sonia!" he called.

There was no answer. He stepped to her alcove and drew back the curtain which concealed it. She was not there.

"Sonia!" he called in a louder voice. "This is strange!"

"She was here but a moment past," said Gilford. "I do not like this, Peter, my friend!"

"She has never done in this wise before," muttered Peter. "However, there is no knowing women, Lord—"

"Plain Harry, prithee."

"What will you make of it, then—Harry?"

"I give it no heed, nor aught else in England after the morrow," answered Gilford, "for we shall take the blue sea for France, and then down to fair Florence and golden Rome. Ah, lad, I know a vintage that does not bloom this side the Alps!"

"I shall bid you good den on the morrow, then," said Peter, "for I cannot leave. The girl is uncared for. There is yet much I may learn from Master Salviati, and—"

"Hark ye!" cried Gilford softly, and he rose from his chair, with head leaned to one side to listen. "Are your doors free to all-comers below, Peter?"

A murmur of voices came faintly from the lower part of the house. Then the stairs creaked from a noiseless step.

"They have tracked me!" said Gilford, and turned pale. "The girl—the fiend of a witch, Peter! She has given them warning!"

Peter went to the top of the stairs. He saw no fewer than four men on the steps, with others grouped below. At the foot of the stairs stood Sonia, lighted faintly by a lantern which one of the men carried. The first two bore naked swords. The ones behind carried harquebuses. At sight of Peter they shouted and leaped forward, while Peter sprang back a pace.

"Not he!" shrilled the voice of Sonia. "He is the one you swore to spare. The other! The other!"

"Stand to my side, Harry!" roared Peter, but Gilford, for the moment paralyzed with fear, could not move. The leading man appeared at the head of the stairs, and seeing Gilford, waved his sword and cried out exultingly.

Peter, forgetful of his own blade, ran at him with naked hands. The fellow cut

sidewise, but Peter ducked agilely under the blow, and, rising, caught the man around the waist.

The others, who were not yet quite at the head of the stairs, paused in astonishment as their companion was heaved clear of the floor. With a great effort Peter hurled him, as if he had been a log, down the steps. Ponderous in armor, he struck against his followers, and the whole group crashed to the floor beneath, an inextricable mass of waving arms and legs.

Sonia screamed; the men shouted "Treason!" and Gilford, now recovered from his first terror, joined Peter with a drawn sword.

"Charge down on them, Peter!" he cried. "We'll put an army of such knaves to flight!"

A leveled harquebus from below caused both Gilford and Peter to leap back out of range. Below them a great tumult raged.

"There's naught for it but flight," said Gilford. "You have stood to the king's officers and are now as great a criminal as I. Which way, Peter?"

Peter made no answer, but led the way to the window of Sonia's room. Below this extended the roof of the neighboring hut.

"Up the stairs and after them, lads!" cried one of the posse. "Yonder Hercules will go down fast enough before my gun."

A shout answered him, and Peter, holding up his sword in one hand, sprang to the window-sill and leaped down onto the roof below. It creaked mightily, but sustained his weight and that of Gilford, who instantly followed. A form appeared in the window above them.

"Watch the street! The villains are loose!" yelled the man, and his harquebus exploded, the bullet flying within a hand's breadth of Peter's head.

Gilford was already at the edge of the roof, and they easily jumped from the low eaves to the ground beneath. In the mean time some of the posse ran from the front of Peter's house, and, seeing the two fugitives, raised a clamor.

"At them first, and then take to our heels!" said Peter, and he closed instantly with the foremost of the enemy.

This man, whose harquebus was quite useless in a hand-to-hand encounter, raised his weapon as a guard to his head; but the blade of the sword-maker beat the gun from his hands and, descending upon the fellows' morion, dropped him, groveling, to earth. Gilford kept two more at his sword's point while Peter parried the thrust of a pikeman, and ran his man through the shoulder.

The others drew back from this deadly encounter, shouting: "Rescue! Rescue!"

"Now!" called Peter to Gilford. They whirled and darted off down the street, Peter in the lead. Two or three harquebuses discharged harmlessly behind them, but the posse evidently had had their fill of fighting for one night, and they made no effort to pursue the fugitives. After dodging around three corners, Peter drew down to a fast walk, and Lord Gilford imitated his example.

"Peter," he said fervently, "of all true comrades and sturdy blades, you are the best that ever stood by me in time of trouble."

"I am done with England," said Peter heavily. "Did you see yonder knave I spitted through the shoulder? Word of that will be brought to the cardinal, and my life and goods will be forfeit."

"Keep a brave heart," answered Gilford. "If we win safe aboard ship I shall write a letter to my father, and if the earl give me not enough to pay you three times over for your losses, I am no true man. But let us on quickly! If there is a ship in harbor bound for France or the Netherlands, we'll board her."

Peter stopped short and shook his fist at the sky.

"Oh, for a whip to scourge myself for a fool," he groaned; "and if ever again I am charitable to a woman, or consider one aught but a treacherous witch, with the heart of a cutthroat, and the soul of a slave, may I be—"

"Hold!" said Gilford. "I have sworn that oath myself a ten times, and if the oath holds, I will be damned blacker than forty fiends!"

"What matter words," said Peter, "I shall not swear. Yet think of it, Harry!

I kept her from death on the streets and tended her till she was well. Would a man have served a dog as she has served me? Harry, there's no understanding these creatures!"

"I think I have heard that before from sundry folk," chuckled Gilford; "but do not be too bitter on her, Peter. She wished no wrong to you; but she heard me tempt you away to Italy, so she brought the cardinal's men to rid you of me and temptation. Is it not plain?"

"I shall not think longer of her," said Peter. "I have striven to study women through her for these many months, and the result of my study is that either all women are mad, or else I myself am fickle-witted."

Gilford, already forgetful of his past perils and those which still confronted them, broke into hearty laughter.

"You shall forget all this in the next draft of wine, friend Peter," he said.

As he spoke they turned down onto the water-front, where the long piers stepped out like shadows into the Thames. They found sailors in groups scattered everywhere, and from them they learned of two ships on which they might sail. One of these touched at two ports in Spain, and traveled at length to Venice, passing first down the western coast of Italy. But it did not weigh anchor for ten days, and they must be away from England on the morrow at the latest.

The second was a small sloop bound for Calais, and due to sail at dawn. They debated for some time before they decided to take passage on this ship. The voyage would carry them, to be sure, away from London; but Calais was as much a part of the king's domains as London itself, and the long arm of the cardinal was scarcely less strong when it reached on the other side of the strait.

Packets constantly left the Thames and Dover for Calais, and on one of these word would surely be sent to warn the king's officers of Gilford and his new companion. Other instances of such seizures, when the fugitives thought them safe across the seas, were fresh in the minds of both men.

— Nevertheless, it was quite possible that

the sloop might reach for Italy across France, a tedious journey and hardly a safe one, but better than to wait in Calais with almost the certainty of being apprehended within a few days.

CHAPTER XIII.

CALAIS.

BEFORE they went aboard the sloop it was necessary for them to put on some sort of disguise. If they were pursued or seen by one of the cardinal's officers, their uncommon size would alone be almost enough to identify them.

Accordingly, they found first the shop of a maker of bows and arrows. Peter selected a black and mighty weapon only a trifle under seven feet long. The seasoned wood was so tough that Lord Gilford, whose training was naturally rather knightly, than yeomanly, could barely string the bow; in the strong hands of Peter it bent freely, and he drew the string back to his ear three times, and let it twang, humming, when released.

After this he conned over a great number of shafts before he found a sufficient quantity of arrows which exactly suited his whims, the feathers trim, the wood strong and light, of a good cloth-yard in length under his doublet, and a steel-lined hat for his head, so that his sword, though much heavier than the ordinary, completed his outfit as a wandering bowman.

Gilford required an entire change of clothes, which he readily found in a nearby shop by exchanging his fine laces and silks for a rough wool suit which gave him the perfect character of a young merchant. To this he added a light cuirass which he wore under the doublet, and a steel-lined hat similar to the one worn by Peter.

Yet he bore this costume with such a jaunty grace that Peter shook his head when they ventured out into the street again.

"We shall be in trouble soon enough, I warrant you," he said, "and we shall be there thrice as soon if you keep to your airs."

"What airs?" asked Gilford, offended.

"Am I not a good, common, jolly fellow that might pass muster in a thousand?"

"Aye," Peter said, "you'd be picked from a thousand soon enough, what with fingering at your throat where the golden chain once hung, and curling your lips when a man jostles your elbow, and fingering your sword when a common man speaks to you. You must learn a different manner with your shoulders and your eyes and your feet. There are no fine dames here to mark your gait, Harry!"

"I shall learn! I shall learn!" grumbled Gilford. "What, Peter, a noble cannot become a clown in the half of an hour!"

He turned a critical eye upon his companion, striving to find some point upon which he could repay this faultfinding. Peter, however, seemed complete in his part, and over his left shoulder the black tip of his bow thrust up till it rose a good foot above his head.

"And for what purpose do you carry a long bow into foreign lands?" he asked at last, unable to find any other fault with his companion.

"What other should I carry?" asked Peter, surprised.

"A good harquebus," said Gilford, "or a stout arbalest. These are the fashions of France, Germany, and Italy. The arbalest has driven out the bow in all those countries, and the harquebus shall drive out the arbalest in turn. Therefore, good Peter, your long-bow is outdated an hundred years."

"For some fat German I doubt not the arbalest is the proper weapon," said Peter, angered by this criticism of the national weapon of England, which would be used by English yeomen even until the later days of Elizabeth, "and for some spindling armed Frenchman or Italian who has not the manliness to pull a stanch long-bow, the harquebus or arbalest may do well enough. But for a true man who has bent the yew and hit the white since his boyhood, give him a stout bow and a full quiver—ha!"

He paused and brandished his fist above his head. Lord Gilford followed the gesture with a sympathetic eye.

"Nevertheless, Peter," he said, "you will grant me that the harquebus shoots straighter and harder and the arbalest carries farther than the long-bow? Nay, I have seen them in war!"

"All weapons have their own peculiar advantages," admitted Peter, "but with a long-bow, if it carry not quite so far as the arbalest, I will shoot six stanch shafts while another fits and aims a single quarrel; and I will loose a dozen honest arrows while two men load and fire a harquebus. Then where is your advantage of harquebus and arbalest?"

Gilford was silent. In his heart, like any true Englishman, he was glad to be argued down. In fact, for many score years after the cross-bow, and then portable fire-arms superseded the simple bow in other countries, the English clung to their old national weapon.

There were reasons for this. It was far larger and stronger than the bows of any other people. A long and painful training made every man in the kingdom expert in its use, so that the rapidity and accuracy with which they used this antiquated arm made it still the most dreaded instrument of war in western Europe.

It was the flight of cloth-yard shafts, darkening, as the chroniclers were fond of saying, the very light of the sun, that decided the bloody battle of Flodden Field against the Scotch pikemen. This conversation brought the two down to their pier.

They boarded the sloop and paid for their passage to Calais. The night was warm, and they had little desire for sleep, so they sat on deck until in the gray of dawn the mariners commenced making their preparations to depart, heaving in the lines which held the ship to the pier, trimming the rigging, and making all shipshape for the voyage.

It required some time to maneuver the ship out from the pier, but once in the open stream the wind cut at a small angle across their stern, and they were soon bowling merrily down the Thames, while the morning came up cheerfully behind the black outlines of London Town.

Gilford was humming a ballad and calling out to the sailors. He already was on

half familiar terms with the skipper, and Peter wondered at seeing a lord of ancient English blood standing to his part in horse-play and jest with common men. Sorrow lay leaden within him, and he would have given his very hopes of fame to be back again in dark London or out in the green fields of Merry England.

He leaned at the prow, and listened to the rush, and watched the white gallop of the bow-wave. They passed the Great Harry, anchored in mid-stream, and apparently ready to weigh for a voyage.

It was a ship of state, the first to be laid down by Henry VIII, and the real beginning of an English navy "strong enough to go anywhere and do anything." A modern launch armed with a three-pounder rifled gun could have steamed out of range of the Great Harry's guns and riddled its hull with steel-nosed bullets, planted between wind and water; but for its day the Great Harry, or, properly, "Henri Grace a Dieu," was a mighty fighting machine. Peter's heart swelled with pride for England as he watched her.

Except for the shortest mizzen, there were two round tops on each of the four masts, and the sails, damasked cloth of gold, were partially unfurled, and flashed and shimmered in the slant rays of the sun. Her quarters, her sides, and even her tops were protected by targets, called heater shields, decorated with the blue cross of St. George and the golden fleur-de-lis. In a great circle on the forecastle were painted the arms of England and France, quarterly crowned, and supported by a lion and a dragon. The same brilliant arms in pale gold and green appeared on the stern.

Seven hundred men manned this prodigy of her age. Her armament consisted of four cannon, three demicannon, besides culverins, sakers, cannon-perers, falcons, fourteen iron port pieces, slings, demislings, fowlers, baessys, top-pieces, hailshot pieces, and a hundred hand-guns.

In a modern harbor this battle-ship would pass as a quaint bit of unseaworthy, gilded wood. To Peter and to every man on his ship, it seemed a mighty leviathan and a new glory to England.

As they floated past this shining vessel, it

seemed to Peter that the great pennon, fifty yards in length, which in the steady breeze stood wavering out from the main-mast, was like a symbol of farewell to him—a prophecy that he should never return to his native land.

All day his melancholy clung to him, and Gilford, after one or more attempts to rally him from his gloom, returned to his rôle of good-fellow among the sailors with the enthusiasm of an actor who has just learned a new part.

A little before night they reached the dark harbor of Calais. On the pier stood a small group of people, some of them laborers, to assist in the unloading of the cargo, and some clerks, come to witness the arrival of the wares. There were others, and Peter scarcely set foot on the pier when the hand of Gilford touched his arm and his voice, said in a cautious tone: "Glance to your right, Peter. There's a keen-eyed fellow searching us! Body of me, I'd swear him for Clare!"

Peter looked up and saw a man with beard trimmed to a point and mustache brushed straight out like a Spaniard. He stood with folded arms, his short cloak waving in the wind, and peered at the passengers as they walked within the light of the two lanterns which hung over the gangway.

Gilford lowered his head and turned it away as if he were engaged in speaking to Peter; but this caution was too late, apparently, for Lord Clare started forward a pace or two; then, as if recollecting himself, turned sharp about and fairly ran in the opposite direction.

Gilford, pale with anxiety, caught at Peter's arm.

"He recognized me. He has gone for his men. Peter, the cardinal has set him on the watch, and Clare hates me as the devil hates virtue. Our tune is played."

"Take heart!" advised Peter, in a gruff undertone, while he made off through the little crowd with great strides. "We shall give him the slip now before he returns with his men. If he takes up with us—"

"Then out swords!" said Gilford readily.

"Nay," said Peter, "not till my shafts are gone!"

He glanced back over his shoulder and saw Clare again approaching, this time at a run, with seven or eight armed men behind him. They were barely fifty yards away; but now Peter and Gilford had gained the head of the pier, the dusk was thickening, and before them opened three or four narrow and crooked alleys. They took to their heels and fled down the nearest, while the pursuers shouted behind them.

Peter had already run away from danger once within the past twenty-four hours; he had no heart for it again. Therefore after they had covered a hundred yards and came to a sharp bend of the alley, he dragged Gilford into an open doorway, drawing his sword at the same time. The latter imitated his example and they stood breathless, waiting.

It was the suddenness of the turn which saved them; for as Clare and his men rushed down the alley they gave no heed to the shallow doorway, and Peter watched them stream past, leaning forward in their eagerness. In a moment they were shouting far down the alley. At once the two stepped out and took the opposite direction.

They had escaped for the instant, but danger still threatened them in the town. That night every tavern in Calais would be searched for them. If they expected safe shelter they must leave the city.

Accordingly, they set out at a brisk pace, fearful lest the gates should be closed before they reached the walls. It was nearly dark when they came to the gate, with the steep shadows from the watch tower on either side falling across it; but it was open, and they passed unchallenged into the free country beyond.

It seemed as if the very air were fresher outside of that dingy town, and happiness returned to Peter as he stared through the gathering night at the road which wound dimly before them. For others it stopped within a few miles. For him it wandered on five hundred leagues to imperial Rome and an unknown fortune.

He joined Gilford in the song which that light heart was now singing, and in this manner they walked on rapidly for nearly two hours. They had put eight miles behind them when they came to a building

too large for the dwelling of a commoner—too defenseless for the residence of a baron.

They recognized it as an inn when they drew closer by the light which burst through many chinks of window and wall, and finally by a sign which they could not make out in the dark. The door stood slightly ajar, so they entered at once into the great host-room.

It was distinctly of the better sort of hostelry. The spacious guest-hall must have been twenty paces in length and half that in width; and the ceiling was not merely rough rafters but carefully finished with smooth boards, at which Peter wondered exceedingly. A fireplace opened at an end of the room with a great pile of logs beside it, but there was no fire on a night so warm as this.

At their entrance not a head turned toward Peter and his companion. Eyes and ears of the score of people in the room were rapt in another interest: that of a dispute between two friars which waxed warm even as the travelers entered. About these two the rest of the people pressed as thickly as they could, their eyes wide and their mouths agape while they glanced from one champion to the other.

Gilford looked to Peter with a grin, who returned his glance with equal humor.

"What do you think of yonder word-warriors?" he asked.

Gilford chuckled.

"We'll start a rival pastime!" he said, and so saying, approached a bald headed man in early middle age who leaned in a corner, surveying the argument and the crowd with twinkling eyes. A lute beside him proclaimed his occupation, and symbols of his work appeared again in his clothes.

He was dressed as brightly as a rainbow, in a sky-blue doublet, sadly stained and travel worn, and bright yellow hose, on the right thigh of which appeared a harp painted in crimson.

Gilford dropped a few small coins into his hand, gestured shortly to the crowd, and turned away. The minstrel, glad enough to call public attention his way, answered Gilford with a low bow, pocketed the money, and without any preliminary

tuning of his instrument, swept the strings and bellowed out in a ringing barytone:

"Ho, gentles, list and hear a tale,
Full rare and curious,
Of how a miller lived in strife
Until he learned to beat his wife
And make her virtuous."

At the promise of this thunderous pre-
amble, all eyes turned from the friars to the
minstrel. The days of troubadours and
trouveres who journeyed through Europe
singing lays of the loves of lords and ladies
had nearly passed. Some minstrels re-
mained, but their themes were changed.
They sang now the exploits of popular
heroes of the *Robin Hood* type or the
vulgar adventures of a common man.

The present tale described how the miller
overheard his wife make an assignation to
meet her lover; how he disguised himself
as the lover, appeared before his wife, sur-
prised her, and drew out a full confession
of her various wrongs; and having soundly
thrashed her, huddled into her clothes and
awaited the coming of the lover with a
cudgel concealed behind him.

At this point, while every one leaned for-
ward, grinning with expectancy, the host
appeared from the kitchen and roared:
"Table, good men, table!"

CHAPTER XIV.

GILFORD TRIES THE POINT.

WITH that he seated himself at the
head of the long board, and the
guests, forgetful of the ending of the miller's
tale, made a general rush to gain the seats
of honor closest to the head of the table.
The scramble ended with Peter wedged be-
tween a traveling surgeon on one side,
and a pardoner on the other. Gilford, less
prompt in the rush for the table, sat far-
ther down, next to a man who might have
passed for a sturdy beggar. He was of a
goodly size, with a generous paunch, and
of a dirtiness unspeakable. His beard, of
a grisly gray, descended to his breast in a
vast tangle. A rough mantle his only gar-
ment, was much frayed about the sleeves,
which hung in rags, and here and there a

wide rent exposed a body grimy as his
hands. Peter, observing Gilford's manifest
distaste at this enforced companionship,
looked at him with a covert smile which was
answered with a sour grimace.

The host's wife and the chambermaid, in
the mean time, brought to each guest a
wooden trencher, a glass drinking cup, and
a wooden spoon. Every man was supposed
to carry his own knife. The food now ar-
rived in quantities, born by the host's wife,
the cook, and a chambermaid.

The chief dish consisted of a great boar,
roasted whole, to assist in the carrying of
which the host himself rose. It had broken
into the fields near the tavern the day be-
fore, and the host, reenforced by all the
men and women in the tavern, sallied out
against it. Many a purple bruise and black
gash on the body testified to the fierce
battle which the tusker had fought.

At various parts of the table little piles
of fish, stacked on fresh leaves, and alter-
nating with loaves of thick-crust bread,
made up the rest of the feast. While the
guests attacked these liberal provisions,
mine host's wife, so plump that her arm
dimpled both at wrist and elbow, bore a
comfortable jug of wine around the table
and filled the cups with claret.

To every man as she passed she gave
words as well as liquor. Some of the
travelers had passed that way before, and
with these she waxed voluble. Strangers
came in for a scarcely less liberal oration.
The white skin of Lord Gilford peculiarly
attracted her, and she paused to pat his
cheek and point out his beauty to the rest
of the table.

Lord Henry scowled but could not frown
down the thunderous laugh, whereat he
turned crimson. To soothe his feelings the
dame kissed him loudly.

When she came to Peter she set down
the wine jug with a little cry and raised up
his great black bow in both her hands. All
eyes turned upon the big Englishman.

"Alack!" she cried, shaking her head,
"what manner of man could shoot this
bow?"

"To my eye," said one of the friars,
who sat directly opposite Peter, "it is more
like a quarter-staff than a bow; yet have I

seen a bow as large and thick as that in an old manor house in Kent."

The hostess set the bow upright, whereat the tip rose above her head almost as high as she could reach. The company laughed again.

"Heu, Jacques!" she cried, "bring me my grandfather's great drinking-cup!"

The cook appeared, carrying a tall and slender pewter cup framed by two large handles. This he placed beside Peter at her directions. It rose a full fourteen inches, and she filled it to the brim from her jug.

"Only a great heart wields such a bow," she said, patting Peter's broad shoulder, "and a great heart needs a great draft. Men are no more what they used to be. I have heard my grandfather tell of a Scotch baron who emptied that cup at a draft."

Peter rose, and holding the great cup by one handle, waved it to the table.

"Good health to all the company," he said, "and may you be the mother of ten, good dame"—he put his lips to the cup and remained drinking, the cup tilting slowly up and up while the table companions, perceiving that he had entered into competition with the Scotch baron of mighty memory, rose and shouted encouragement—"and every one of them able to drink such a potion as this without lowering the cup!"

He set the huge flagon upon the table, and instantly a dozen heads crowded over it. It was quite empty, and they set up a shout, while the hostess bore the cup away, nodding her head with wonder.

The company transferred its attention from Peter to the roasted boar. Thereafter a significant silence lasted until only the white skeleton of the porker remained, the ruins of a noble edifice.

Peter's head sang for a moment after his enormous draft, but before the meal ended his mind cleared. The company lingered about the table, lolling on their stools, loosening belts, and polishing off the remnants of the wine. Their tongues plied rapidly, so that a din rose over an accompaniment of snoring where two or three wearier, or weaker men slept with their heads pillowed on their arms.

"And this thumb," the pardoner was saying—here he reached into his scrip and produced the white bones of the two last joints of a thumb—"this thumb is a relic of the blessed St. Jean of Lyons."

The pardoner's audience crossed themselves and raised their eyes an instant to the ceiling.

"He who owns this bone," said the pardoner, "is healed by the mere touching of it from the sin of theft, so that his soul is washed clean again."

A murmur of wonder passed about the table. Peter crossed himself, and mumbled a prayer.

"If you may heal the hurts of the soul," said the physician on the other side of Peter, anxious to claim his share of the public attention, "it is my province to heal the ills of the body; and the miracles I have worked are no less wonderful."

The pardoner smiled with a certain superior indifference.

"If he can exhibit a miracle as great as that which I have even now shown you, the relic of the blessed St. Jean can perform, let it be done. Otherwise let this man hold his peace."

Thus put to the proof, the physician was no wise abashed, but cleared his throat, and tapped authoritatively on the table.

"The soul is not my province," he began, "but as for the body, if any man have an ill—yea, if he do lie at the very point of death—let him come to me and I shall make him whole!"

"Can this be true? Is it e'en so? Marvelous! Marvelous!" the exclamations ran the length of the table and back.

"Words," said the pardoner hotly, no whit desirous of yielding his vantage ground, "words are cheap in the mouth of any man. Let us see the proofs."

The physician ran his eyes around the room from face to face, and then sighed with regret.

"I see no man here that is perilously near to death," he said, "otherwise I should use somewhat more than words to prove my truth. But here"—and he drew from a pouch a little case of wood, curiously carved—"here is an ointment so marvelous in its properties that there be none

like it within the limits of the earth. I made this salve and prayed over it for the space of three months, night and day, and all that time the Lord sustained the strength of my body so that I waxed fat upon water only!"

Peter felt the breath going from him as it leaves a man suddenly immersed in water.

"And what is its particular property, noble sir?" he asked reverently.

"I am drawing close to that," said the other. "If a man's flesh be wounded—yea, even if his leg or his arm be cut through, let the cut be closed, and let a little of this ointment be rubbed over the surface. Then wrap the wound in a red cloth and never remove it for the space of three days. At the end of that time draw the cloth away and the limb will be whole, or the wound will be closed and sound."

He ceased with a smile of triumph directed at the pardoner, who scowled back, though the rest of the company, even Lord Gilford, broke into subdued ejaculations.

"If you doubt," said the physician eagerly, and bending forward, "take up your knife and cut your hand. Then will I apply this ointment, and not a man here but shall witness the truth of what I say!"

Every one held breath, awaiting the marvelous trial, but the pardoner lacked heart to assist in the miracle. He glanced first at the knife, then at his hand, and finally shook his head. The physician accepted this as a token of surrender, and continued his oration:

"Other great cures I have myself invented. On a time I came upon a great man, the lord of many fair castles and wide domains. He was sore afflicted with stone. For ten days I labored over him, using all known cures, but naught could avail. At length I thought of collecting some of these beetles which in summer are found in the dung of oxen, also of the crickets which sing in the fields.

"I cut off the heads and wings of the crickets and put them with the beetles and common oil into a pot. I covered it and left it afterward for a day and night in a bread-oven. I drew out the pot and heated it at a moderate fire. I pounded the whole and rubbed the sick parts. In three days

the pain had disappeared. The stone broke into pieces and the man was cured!"

He paused only long enough for the applause to abate a little and went on: "This and other great cures have come into my mind as it were by inspiration. Once a man was sore stricken with a disease of the spleen, and after much meditation it came to me to take the heads of seven fat bats and stew them. Then I drained off the broth, gave it to the man to drink, and for the first time in his life, he found himself in good health!"

It seemed to Peter that he had never enjoyed such good company in his life. To his right sat a man who could cure for a small price every evil of the soul. To his left was one who banished the very thought of death. Nevertheless he was weary from his sleepless night before and from the long walk.

He willingly obeyed a sign from Gilford, and they went to the room which the hostess had assigned for their use, a little oblong apartment which opened from the end of the upper hall, with a candle for light and two meager heaps of straw for beds. On these they flung themselves, and were instantly asleep.

Peter woke with some one shaking him roughly by the shoulder. He reared up on an elbow, groaning.

"Rise!" said the voice of Gilford in the dark. "Here's the hostess asking for you at the door. I misdoubt some mischief."

Peter went to the door, rubbing his eyes, and flung it open. He was immediately seized by the arm and shaken again.

"Are you he of the black bow?" whispered the voice of the hostess. "Ay, I can tell you by the height of your shadow! Then get you gone and leave this white-cheeked friend. Take up your bow and after me instantly!"

"What now?" rumbled Peter.

"Soft! Soft!" she cautioned him. "They are making ready to come up!"

"Who?" asked Peter, now wide awake and alert.

"A fierce mustached man and eight others. They came at midnight and asked after two tall men, him of the yellow hair and the white face—likewise after you;

but him they want the most. My good-man knew at once you two were the men, for such a twain of big men have not come here within this six month. He told the men, and they were glad, but their leader spoke most of him with the yellow hair. Come quick and let him bide. One man I can save, but not two. There is a way—"

He flung her from his arm, and turned to Gilford.

"Belt on your sword—no, there's no time for that—take it up and after me—Clare is here!" he said.

Gilford snatched up his weapon and sprang to his side. At the same time a door opened below and the sound of several voices rose to them. The stairs creaked.

The hostess, wringing her hands, turned and fled, disappearing into a door which she slammed, and they heard the click of the bolt as they rushed after her. Flickering torch-light shone up the stairs and struck, red and glimmering, upon the ceiling of the long hall.

"Back to the room and out a window," whispered Peter, "the witch has deserted us. There is no other way down than the stairs."

They hurried on tiptoe back to their room, and as they closed and bolted the door, several men came from the stairs into the hall. When they looked down from the window in the dim moonlight, they saw the side of the tavern drop, sheer and unbroken by any ledge, a full thirty feet. A hand tried their door cautiously.

"Take your sword and stand ready while I string my bow," whispered Peter, "and say nothing if they challenge us!"

He picked up his long bow and began to string it, a difficult task in the dark.

"Open!" called a voice from without.

"Your race is ended, Harry of Gilford," added another, "and Stephen of Clare has come for thee. Dead or alive, your body shall back to London."

In answer came a faint hiss of steel against steel as Gilford unsheathed his sword.

"They won't open—it's a fight," said Clare from without. "Batter the lock in with your bill, lad."

A thundering stroke on the door followed.

Peter finished stringing the bow and stood with an arrow ready and the bow half drawn to his ear. As the door sagged under the attack the red light of torches struggled into the room through two or three cracks, and gave the defenders wild and uncertain glimpses of each other.

"More to one side, Harry," said Peter in a low voice, "for now—"

The door crashed inward, making Gilford leap back to avoid the fall, and in the entrance stood a man with a great brown bill. Peter's bow twanged, an arrow drove into the shoulder of the fellow, and he fell sprawling back with a yell.

"Into the room!" called Lord Clare. "At them, lads!"

Two more men blocked the entrance with a rush, but there they stuck, for the door was not wide enough for both. The bow sounded again and one of them pitched into the room on his face. Gilford cut down the second; the rest of them held back.

Peter dropped his bow, and drawing his sword joined Gilford at the door. The next attack would be more cautious and there was no longer an opportunity for archery.

"Come again, my heroes," shouted Gilford, "come again and we'll make you all inherit land. Seven feet of honest soil for six feet of roguery! Ha, Clare! Have you forgotten the tilting yards so soon?"

Lord Clare shook his blade so that the red light flashed and slipped along it.

"It was the stumble of my horse!" he answered. "It was no skill of yours, Gilford!"

"Get on your horse once more," answered Gilford, "for if you come within stroke of my sword, I promise you shall stumble again. Stand forth like a man, Clare!"

"Keep back yonder black-browed devil!" answered the other. "And we'll fight this matter, man to man. Stand off, lads, and trust to my blade!"

His men, glad enough to be freed from this dangerous duty, drew off and allowed full room to Lord Clare. He ran to the battle like a bloodhound when he sights the prey after a long and weary chase. Gilford met him with a shout.

There was no chance for much skill of fence, for the hall was narrow and they could neither advance nor retreat far. Accordingly they stood close and exchanged a dozen ringing blows, all successfully parried.

"The point! The point, Harry!" cried Peter.

Gilford, as though ready to follow this advice, lunged, offering with his point at Clare's breast; but when the other dropped his high guard to meet the stroke, Gilford whirled his blade in a quick circle. It struck his opponent fairly on the crest of the morion.

If it had not been for the high ridge of steel which strengthened the head-piece, he must have been cut to the brows by the stroke. As it was, the force of the blow hurled him to the floor. His followers yelled, but before they could spring forward to the rescue, Peter leaped in front of Gilford, and kneeling above the fallen man, held a knife poised above his throat.

"Keep back!" he threatened, "or I'll send your master to hell, and you can follow him for your wages!"

"Stand away, Peter," panted Gilford. "This is no tavern brawl, but a combat between knights and gentlemen."

"Gentlemen be damned," said Peter. "It's a fight for my skin—and yours! Hold still, sir, or I'll open your gullet wider than ever was your mouth!"

This he addressed to Lord Clare, who stirred and groaned, recovering his senses. The sight of the steel poised and glittering above his face cleared his mind at once.

"Tell your men to hold back!" ordered Peter.

"For the love of God," cried the baron, "make no mischief, lads, or I'm a dead man! Worthy sir, hold your hand and you shall go your way unhindered of me and mine!"

"So!" grunted Peter. He caught his lordship by the scruff of the neck and jerked him to a standing position. "Now walk down the stairs before me. If one of your men come too close behind us, this bit of cold steel shall visit your ribs."

They went down the stairs in this manner, Gilford going first, and Peter follow-

ing, with his prisoner still caught by the shoulder. The followers of Clare, with the adjurations of their master ever in their ears, kept back to a secure distance.

In the hall below they found all the guests of the tavern assembled. They had been roused by the clamor of the conflict, and they now formed a group headed by the landlord. They made up a motley crew, some of them not more than half dressed, and all armed with some hasty sort of weapon, from a chunk of wood to a kitchen knife. At sight of Peter and the rest they set up a shout.

Peter ordered his host to have two of the best of Clare's horses saddled at once. The landlord wavered for a moment. On the one hand there was the voice of Clare shouting that if he followed the order he would be strung up by the neck at the order of England's king. On the other hand, on the side of Peter there was evidently the great argument of the present power.

The latter was the more convincing voice. He sent two of his servants into the stables to pick out two of the best horses and make them ready for the fugitives.

With Clare still firmly in his grasp, Peter led the way out to the yard between the stable and the tavern, where the host held two saddled horses by the bridle reins.

"Mark this, Harry of Gilford," said Clare, "you add theft to your other crimes!"

Peter climbed into a saddle and dragged Clare up before him.

"Villain!" cried the noble, "you shall be flayed alive for this!"

"All in good time," grinned Peter. "Horse, horse, Harry!"

Gilford was in the saddle at once, and though two of Clare's followers made a threatening approach as if they would attempt a rescue even at this late hour, their master's voice warned them away, for the knife still gleamed naked in Peter's hand.

They spurred out to the highroad, and as they left the courtyard, Clare's men rushed to the stables to saddle their horses for the pursuit. Half a mile down the road Peter allowed Clare to slip to the ground.

"Get back to your hounds, sir," he

said. "You've given us a hunter's start, and we cry you no farther mercy."

Gilford laughed, and Clare, for rage and shame, was speechless. The two turned their horses up the road, and in another moment a hilltop shut out all view of what lay behind.

The road dipped into a shallow valley and rose again on the farther side. As they neared the top of this slope, they saw the tiny figures of the pursuing cavalcade. They gave their horses the spur again across a hilly country where the road wound back and forth and up and down, so that they never regained a sight of their followers. In this manner they came to a crossroad at the base of a hill. Peter held up his hand and drew rein.

"Harry," he said, "here we part."

"Part?" repeated Gilford.

"To meet again in Rome. There is no other way. The description of us is abroad. Wherever we go men will remember the passing of two riders such as we. But if we ride singly we shall not be noted."

Gilford looked down the road with a wry countenance.

"You are right," he answered; "but this is a hard parting, Peter. In Rome we shall meet, unless water or fire or steel end one or both of us this side of it. Farewell, Peter."

Their hands met, and Peter grinned broadly.

"That was a shrewd knock you fetched yonder knave of a lord, Harry," he said.

"Ah," said Gilford; "but it was the trick of the point that laid him open to it. Adieu! At the house of Messer Ottaviano di Cagli we meet again in Rome. Remember!"

CHAPTER XV.

ON TO ROME.

WHEN the soldiers of the watch drew back from the swords of Peter and Lord Gilford, and then pursued the fugitives with curses only, Sonia kneeled within the house of the sword-maker and prayed in a strange language for his life. Then she heard the voices of the watch as they

took their way back down the street. The wounded men groaned as their comrades helped them along. Half a dozen paused at the door of the shop.

"Let's go in and find the witch who sent us here," said one. "We'll have her skin for bringing us to two devils when we were looking for men alone."

"Did you hear her screech when I leveled my harquebus at the fiend of a sword-maker?"

"Nay, lads, what's to do with her? She's honest enough, I trow. Let's begone. We shall have to answer scores enough without bringing down wrath for mistreating a harmless wench."

This argument proved conclusive, and the group moved on down the street. Even when she heard the threat, Sonia did not stir from the place in which she knelt. She was long since past fear of trifles. She had lost Peter irrevocably, and that fact was enough to fill her consciousness.

After a time the silence began to eat into her heart. She discovered that her knees ached. Then she rose and went slowly up the stairs to the room above. Here was a stool overturned. There was the dint of an armed heel. She threw a hand up before her face and rehearsed the scene with closed eyes. After that she went to a corner and sat there with white face and hands fallen loosely into her lap while she gave herself up to sorrow.

She had not dreamed such an outcome of her venture. When she heard Gilford urge Peter to go with him toward Italy, the blood had congealed in her heart. Then Peter refused the offer—pointed out some of the difficulties. She breathed again. Later he wavered; seemed to give way once more.

And that decided her. This man who fled from the law was taking away the sword-maker to a far country to which he could not possibly bring her. Nay, he even seemed to think it strange that she should wish to stay with him here in England. Moreover, he could not bear the expense of taking her with him overseas.

All this she knew before the argument was a moment old. And knowing this, she had acted. The man had himself pointed

out the way of his undoing. She went down to the street, found a group of armed men walking not far away, or loitering about, learned in a dozen words that they were the men she searched for, and offered to lead them directly to their quarry. They came at once, making her promise of rich rewards for the information.

She had no care for their money. She merely wished to rid Peter of a dangerous influence. Neither had she any scruples about the treachery of the part she played. By being treacherous to the stranger she would in the end be befriending Peter. Moreover she was hardened to such things.

Many a month of anguish of spirit lay behind her, many a month of wandering, and hopeless sorrow so great that she dared not look back upon it. Nevertheless that suffering was never far from her consciousness, and it was this which hardened her against Gilford.

He threatened to take Peter from her, and to her Peter was nine-tenths of life. To realize how much he meant one must go back with Sonia's thoughts to the day he found her. A week before she had escaped from a slave-dealer in London.

It was bitter winter, and the cold made her a chill host with her regained liberty. Once or twice she was on the point of returning to the slave-dealer and his atrocious methods.

Her pride, stronger than her love of life, kept her from this last decline. She strove to beg in the streets, but she could not tell the opportune places in which to ask for money. Begging, unless that of licensed cripples, did not thrive in Merry England.

She gained a few pennies, dragged on a miserable existence for ten days, and finally stumbled over a drift of snow and lay there, too weak to rise and fight again for life. The cold numbed her. She fell into the sleep which often ends in death.

If there was another ending to that sleep, it was only because chance brought Peter Warburton down that same street. She woke with the gracious warmth of an open fire beside her, the almost forgotten softness of a mattress beneath her, and the leonine face of the sword-maker scowling on her anxiously from above.

It was not easy for her to adjust herself to this man. She had never known many people, even when she lived in the household of her well-to-do father. And since she left him, what she read in the book of human nature made her think all men of the breed of Cain.

By good luck, however, she had fallen into the hands of one who was among men almost as rare as she was among women. The fact of his honesty was almost like a physical force. His clumsy strength exaggerated his gentleness toward her. And finally she was conquered.

But women, when they are conquered in one way are very apt to be conquered in all. It was so with Sonia. The sword-maker asked merely for her confidence and trust; she gave him her whole heart instead, and of course he could not dream it.

If he had loved her, if he had pressed gentle attentions upon her, she would have despised him at first and hated him afterward; but he treated her as if she were merely a suffering animal which he must heal, make strong, and send out upon its way.

For this very fact it became torture for her to think of leaving him. Even the most hermitlike of human beings loves to feel that other men are aware of his existence, even if he be only a tradition to the world. Few would banish themselves from society without first announcing their withdrawal.

But, as far as she could tell, Sonia made no impression upon the iron-souled sculptor. He was the "irresistible force," but Sonia was not the "immovable object." The result was that she gave way, and having once lost a little ground, she examined her soul and heard a voice within her say: "You love this man better than your life!" It was more astonishing to Sonia than was the cry of "Land ho!" to the travel-worn Columbus.

Having learned this cardinal fact, she adapted herself as well as she could to the intrusion of this new personality into her life. She had plenty of time for this. When she sat in the shadow of the room watching the massive head of the sword-maker as he bent over his drawing-board, many a time she strove by the sheer force

of her wish to make him raise his eyes to her, but she might better have striven to influence a senseless rock. If he had selected with careful forethought a scheme of manners through which to pique her interest, he could have lighted upon no better plan.

She found that she was to his life what the reflection is to the running stream; her image remained with him, but his thoughts eternally flowed on to mirror a thousand new objects.

A year before she would have forced his attention to her by some violent outburst of emotion, but lately she had been schooled in pain and she had learned the bitter lesson of repression. Therefore, though her love was a continual voice within her, it brought never a whisper to her lips, except, perhaps, for that one night when Peter had found her kneeling at her window.

She retraced all this past life of hers now while she sat in the room. The silence grew to be like a hand, stifling her. She picked up one of his sketches. It was like a small copy of his soul—the rough, strong strokes, the carelessness of detail, the earnest effort. Men groan when they are most deeply hurt, but women smile, and now Sonia smiled.

For she saw in her loss of Peter the permanent loss of all her hopes of happiness. There was the one nature strong enough to match hers. She looked down to her hand. It was slender and finely modeled, and nervously strong. She thought of Peter's hand. It seemed merely a larger copy of her own, blunted by heavy labor.

Strange are the causes which break down our self-control! Hitherto she had borne up against a grief which beat in her heart like waves of an incoming tide, each rolling higher; but now a gust of wind caught at a target on the wall, stirred it slightly, and set it clashing silverly against one of Peter's long swords.

She heard the sound, she watched the stir, she saw the hilt which she had seen him fondle—and then she wept. Yet even then she controlled the sound of her sobbing as if he had been in the room.

The fall of tears seemed to clear her mind as rain clears the sky. One of those fair-haired, gentle-hearted daughters of En-

gland might have surrendered to despair, but this was a northern barbarian, and in *her* hope could not cease until the death of desire.

She marshaled the facts. Peter was gone, and he was gone for Rome. Moreover, she knew that once there he would not rest until he met the Lady Beatrice della Marca.

There were two goals, then, before her. One was to reach Rome, and then through that Roman lady to find Peter. What she could do after she met him did not matter.

But to start for Rome without friends to protect her on the way—without money to help her? Experienced men might well shrink from such an attempt. Yet there was no shrinking in Sonia. She had seen too much sorrow to shrink now from danger. If a gambler has once risked all upon one cast of the dice, he will take the same risk again and defy chance.

Not so long before, Sonia had risked all when she left her father's house. She was willing to take the same risk again. She went into the little alcove which had served her for a room and took out from a recess a lute. This had been her companion during the long hours when Peter was at the work-shop of Lionardo Salviati, but he had never even suspected that she had it in her possession. Nevertheless it should be the power which would take her to Rome. Now, on to Rome!

She took a last survey of the room, holding the lute in her hand, when she remembered with a start that Peter might have left his purse of money in its usual place.

Sure enough, it was there! She counted out twenty broad gold pieces—a small fortune, and enough to take her easily to her goal. If she left them here they would merely fall the prey of the first vagabond who searched the place. Yet her hand dropped to her side and the gold pieces scattered, chiming, across the floor. If she followed him it could not be through means which he had himself left behind. The lute alone should be her passport to Rome.

With her foot on the stairs, she stopped again to look over the room. It was very dim. A single sputtering lantern set the place awash with shadows. One or two

waves of light splashed upon the steel scabbards along the wall. In a moment more the house would be dark. She hurried down the stairs.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE HAZARD OF THE SEA.

THE first gray of the dawn was already in the street, and it grew lighter momentarily. Yet presently she saw three men approaching, two of whom held torches for a third. This man walked between the others, his hands leaning upon their shoulders.

There was absolutely no need for the artificial lights, which looked pale and small already; but the two men walking on the outside held the lights above them with stiff arms as though they lighted the other man through a perfect abyss.

As they came closer, Sonia made out that they were servants carrying their master home from some revel. He was the worst for many potations, for his feet struck out shamblingly and his knees shook.

She drew aside and pressed close to the wall of a house to let them pass, but when the three were exactly opposite her, the middle man, a stout fellow with a face which was red even by this pale light of morning, lurched toward her with outstretched arm. She slipped away, but his hand caught her mantle, and she was hemmed in instantly by the two servants.

"A singing-girl!" said the middle man, and his head shook from side to side as he spoke. "A singing-girl, by God! I'll have her home with me if she costs me a king's ransom. Damn me, is she young or old, fair or wrinkled. I see only her lute!"

One of the men started to speak, but he stopped as he caught the imploring gesture of Sonia.

"Old, sir," he said to his master.

Sonia thanked him with her eyes while his dim-eyed master cursed his ill luck.

"Nevertheless she shall not escape from me," he said, his head still wagging as if he had not the strength to keep it upright for a continued period. "She shall sing, damn her. Sing!"

Sonia obeyed at once, catching her lute into position and striking up a war ballad. Her voice rose strikingly clear and sweet, and the three men drew back a little as though to give her freer range. Meantime the middle man grew stronger and more a master of himself. The wagging of his head ceased. As the song ended, Sonia found herself staring into eyes from which the last glaze of liquor was gone.

"Old, did ye say?" And he turned threateningly on his servant.

Before the latter could stammer an excuse, the threat changed to good humor.

"By my soul, ye have a conscience, sir knave, and ye shall profit by it. And you, girl"—he paused again, and his eyes surveyed her leisurely—"as fresh as the new dawn. But I am old—old—too old! Fare thee well, my child, and here's what will help thee from the streets. My purse, ye dogs!"

One of the men handed him a long, furred purse. He thrust a hand into it, scowled, and then emptied the contents into his hand. It contained three gold pieces and a whole handful of small silver and copper coins. He passed them all to Sonia. She would have protested at this overwhelming generosity, but he waved her gratitude away into thin air.

"You are the better part of Circe, girl," he said, "for when you find men fallen into the sty you show them they are swine and turn them back into men. Get me home, lads! I am old—I am very old, alack!"

And so they went on down the street. She followed them with her eyes until they turned a corner. The middle man no longer needed assistance as he walked. It seemed that fortune was truly smiling upon her. She had not dreamed that in a month she could make so much money, and here she had scarcely put foot in the street before her hand was full of gold and silver.

Gold! She stopped to stare at it again, and then went on singing. One or two of the laborers whom she passed stopped and turned to look after her, her voice was so high with gladness!

The money which this rich man's generosity supplied her with would help her well along the way. In England, as she

could not but remember, beggars got small alms, even when they returned music for gold. She determined to try that very day to get a ship which would start her toward Italy.

At the docks she found the same ship which had tempted Peter and Gilford the evening before, but like them her eagerness could not wait for its sailing. Moreover, she had not quite enough money to buy a passage for so long a voyage. The best she could do was to purchase a trip to Harfleur on a trading vessel which sailed late that night.

It was a blunt-nosed craft, very high in the bow and the stern, and very low in the waist, an exaggeration of the fashion of the day in ship building. It was not till a much later date that navigators discovered that this elevation in front and back did little to make a vessel more seaworthy.

Her speed rivaled that of a modern barge, and when the breeze behind her was stiff she threw up a tremendous bow-wave. There was such a wind bowling her along when she stood down the Thames that night with Sonia sitting on a coil of rope and staring ahead into the darkness. When Peter made that trip down the Thames not long before, his heart went back to the heart of London, but Sonia's thoughts flew far forward. Her soul was already walking the streets of Rome.

Her plan was to start overland from Harfleur toward Italy. It would be a journey of many months, but she trusted much to her singing to help her on her way. Those Polish chants—those fiery chants of war—they lighted the eyes of all listeners, and it mattered not that the language was not understood. They would bring her to Rome at last.

Dangers of river, and sea, and road—dangers of weather and the greater dangers of man—she heeded not. Desire was her only fact and law. She was the only passenger on the ship, and this freed her from any annoyance of attentions from men. As for the captain and his men, they were having their hands full in the management of the ship.

From the moment they cast loose from the docks the wind was half a gale behind

them, and when they reached the sea they found it rough—no large, long-rolling waves, but choppy whitecaps that tossed the clumsy hulk from side to side till she reeled and staggered drunkenly through the waters. Nevertheless the sky was clear overhead, and the bright, cheerful blue gave the sailors heart for their task.

At noon of the next day a cloud blew up in the northwest. It was rather a long line of white vapor than a cloud, and it mounted up the sky rapidly, as if some giant and invisible hand were drawing a curtain to shut out the light of the sun. The underside of that solid sheet of vapor was gray, though the top was pure and fleecy white.

Before it covered half the heavens the wind had freshened to a gale, and the sailors were scurrying here and there about the decks with anxious faces, or calling to each other from the rigging as they shortened sail. Sometimes a few of them took up a chant as they worked, but the singing stopped almost at once.

For half an hour the ship howled along in this manner when the wind, as if it wearied of playing with this toy, gathered all its force and smote the ship with a sound like the clapping of a vast paddle against water.

The vessel heeled over to an angle of forty-five degrees, and even over the yell of the wind rang the scream of a sailor who was hurled from the mainmast top into the ocean. Sonia's was the only eye which turned toward the spot at which he disappeared. The rest were laboring for dear life at the ropes, taking in sail.

They could not work fast enough. The ship still continued to heel over. Sonia, as she grasped a rope's end at her side of the ship, found herself staring down into a boiling water. The captain, clinging to the deck at a fearful angle, with the wind tugging strongly at his jacket, passed her, shouting orders to the men, a few of whom stuck to their work of reefing aloft. He was pale even through the deeply weathered tan of his face.

In spite of the horror of the moment—or perhaps because of it, she noted him carefully and saw the thousand little lines which covered his skin. They were rather

like the scars of a myriad slight knife cuts than wrinkles.

His orders were lost in the mighty calling of the storm, and even if they had been heard the sailors could not have obeyed them swiftly enough to keep the ship from foundering. The very force of the wind was what saved them, for with a report like the discharge of a great piece of ordnance it burst the mainsail into a hundred pieces, which flapped wildly from the mast. The rest of the sails were nearly reefed, so that the breaking of this huge canvas took half the pressure from the masts.

The ship lurched back a dozen degrees toward the upright, and continued slowly to right itself. Sonia could see the sailors

cheering, but she could not hear even a whisper of their voices.

Still the vessel drove on at a ghastly speed up and down the waves. Had they been near land they would have been inevitably lost, for it was impossible to steer in any direction except before the wind. It was a grim sensation to see the ship, without a sail set, running so swiftly through the chopped ocean.

But the wind, as if some malevolent spirit directed the storm and now saw that the gale could not overwhelm the merchantman, fell away as swiftly as it had risen. Within twenty minutes there was not a breath of it stirring. And now even greater peril threatened them.

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)



A Liar in the Kiva

by
William H. Hamby

I.

BEN HUGHES came swinging down the curved stairs of the ancient De Vargas Hotel with an appetite and a buoyant expectancy. He had only one day in Santa Fe before starting north into the mountains on his special mission, and he did not know what he was going to do with it; but whatever it was would be interesting. Everything was interesting to Ben, and this old, old West was most interesting of all.

It was just sun-up, but already other people were down.

"Would you like to join a party to Frijoles Cañon?" asked the clerk as Hughes turned in his key.

"Who is the party?" asked Ben.

"Archeological mutts," the clerk nodded irreverently toward a group of four standing in the lobby near the entrance. "The driver won't make the trip for less than five passengers."

Ben turned and looked at the group. A mild-looking, round-faced man with glasses, who looked blankly into space as though watching for the ghosts of vanished races; a lumpy, loping-looking woman of forty-seven, of the sort who is always taking up something and had probably hit on archeology during a transition from some health-fad to a new religion; a tall, muscular chap with prominent cheek-bones, a thin nose, small eyes, and a smudge of a mustache—and a girl. If that girl was an archeological mutt, Ben was strong for archeology.

"Yes," he said to the clerk, "I'd like to go with them."

The clerk led him up and introduced him to the party, and they were off immediately. The lumpy woman sat beside Ben in the folding-seat, and the two other men and the girl sat in the back seat.

Most of the way the mild man with the glasses and the ghost of lost races in his eyes, discussed belligerently with the lumpy woman the folly of somebody, of whom Ben had never heard, trying to prove something, Ben did not understand, by an inscription in Peru; when the inscription the mild man himself had found in Yucatan proved exactly the opposite.

As often as he could find an excuse of casualness Ben looked back at the girl, the daughter of the archeologist. She had a clear, pink skin, and a way of looking up at you through long lashes as though expecting to be surprised. Once she met Ben's eyes with a twinkle.

"Are you an archeologist, Mr. Hughes?"

"If I am, Miss Lawrence, it is very recent." Ben's brown eyes crinkled a little at the corner. "I never came in conflict with the word until to-day."

But before the conversation went farther—and at each subsequent effort to renew it—the tall man with the possessive air and the smudge of a mustache managed to interrupt and exclude Ben from a further place in the landscape. Whatever interest the fellow—his name was King Daniels—had in archeology, it did not lead him into any abstract gazing into space.

Hughes was vexed—but there was time enough. With a day like this, and the wild level mesa, and the terrific piles of mountains yonder in the sun, life seemed like some strange, wild experience of which he had dreamed in boyhood.

No wonder, thought Ben, Allen had loved this. Allen was the big brother when Ben was a little shaver, and used to sit out with him on the warm side of a straw-stack on winter Sundays and read endless tales of the Wild West. Ben could remember yet how flushed Allen's face would get, and what a restless, far-off look would come into his eyes as these stirring tales of adventure unfolded. And poor old Allen—Ben felt a

choke in his throat even now, twenty years after—had answered the call of this West. And they had never seen him again. He had died out here somewhere.

The archeological party left the machine at the top, and climbed down an almost perpendicular wall into the cañon.

In front of the log-house, where visiting scholars and curious tourists stayed while studying these relics of a vanished race, Ben had another chance to speak with the girl, while Daniels of the smudge mustache carefully removed the soil from his shoes and trousers.

"Really, aren't you interested in archeology?" The daughter of the scientist lifted her blue eyes to his half chidingly.

"I probably would be if I knew anything about it," Ben smiled. "Would you explain the a, b, c's to me?"

"I'll show you some of the cliff dwellings," and she started as though to lead the way up the stream fringed with cottonwood.

At that moment the shirt-sleeved patriarch came to the door of his cabin.

"Is there any one in the party named Hughes?"

It was a telephone call from the Western Union at Santa Fe, forwarding a telegram to him.

As Ben came out of the cabin the girl and Daniels were just crossing the creek on a cottonwood log fifty yards up-stream.

Hughes followed the path through the narrow fringe of cottonwood on the right bank of the stream. A dead chunk lay across the path. He kicked it so violently it almost broke his foot. "Oh, the dickens!" And he put all the aggravations of life—and there are a good many—into the tone as he limped on.

Across the creek in the cliff that faced the sun he saw row after row of ancient cliff dwellings. Little rooms dug into the soft tufa—volcanic rock.

He waded the creek—not even caring to look for a safe crossing, and climbed the cliff to one of those rooms. It was conical in shape, a narrow, low door, and inside was deep dusk.

He stooped and entered, and sat down on a loose boulder and leaned against the wall of the ancient dwelling.

"I suppose," thought Ben, "once this cañon was full of strange voices—busy warriors carrying in meat from the hunt, squaws sitting in the sun at that door watching them; children playing down there by the water—hundreds of years ago. Now their houses still stand here in the sun, and they are gone, and we do not even know who they were, or which way they went."

It gave him a queer, detached feeling—a sense of personal insignificance—but of impersonal immortality. After all, how little the facts of the day counted! After all, human interest and human love were the only things that lasted. These cliff-dwellers had been gone hundreds of years, but scientists still came from the corners of the earth to study the traces they had left. And Allen had been gone twenty years, but still he loved him as he had the last day they sat in the sun together.

He gave a little jump—for the sounds of steps and rolling rock broke into his speculations. Some one was standing in front of the door.

It was an Indian—a young Indian with shifty black eyes, and the dress of a cowboy.

"Is eet"—the Indian spoke with Spanish accent—"Meester Daniels?"

"No," replied Ben.

"Excuse." And the young Indian was gone.

"Now I wonder," speculated Ben, "why Daniels had an appointment here with an Indian? Possibly he is not as much interested in archeology as he seems." He got up, and, stooping, passed through the door. "We will just find out."

II.

At five o'clock, when the rest of the party were still out, Hughes telephoned from the cabin to Santa Fe a message changing the date of his departure on the northern trip.

He had seen something in the meeting of Daniels and the young Indian that needed explanation.

In the dusk Ben found himself alone with the daughter of the archeologist. They were in front of the cabin watching the light fade from the top of the mountains visible to the north.

"I climbed up to one of the cliff-dwellings," he said, "and nearly went into a trance mooning about the people who had come and gone. I almost imagined I could still hear their calls from cliff to valley, and see their moccasined feet crossing the threshold. It felt queer being a live man in a dead man's house."

"Why, Mr. Hughes." There was a rippling, girlish laugh, and she looked up at him through her long lashes. "You are an archeologist."

"It is fascinating," she mused, "recreating from a bit of pottery or the figures on a stone the life and art, and heart of a lost people."

"They found the other day among the pottery excavated up by the Jemez Mountains a set of tiny dishes made by a little child. As her mother had fashioned her pottery, the little girl had made a play-set—the tiny finger-prints still showed. There were two of each kind—two plates, two little water-jars, two little meal-bowls—the little girl was going to have a party. We know it was the custom to break and throw away a dead child's toys. But in this instance the mother's love was too strong—and the little play-dishes had been buried with the child."

He knew, although looking away toward the fading light, there were tears in her eyes—and there was a suspicious swelling in his own throat.

"Archeology is interesting, isn't it?" She broke the emotional stress with a laugh.

"If that is archeology—it is," he admitted. "But I can't imagine anything that would not be interesting—if you told it."

"Thank you," she said. "There is no interesting speaker without an interesting listener."

She was as interesting a listener as she was a speaker, when he told her about Allen—of the stories read behind straw-stacks, of the loss of that hero big brother in this great West.

"It seems," said Ben, "almost as though I had seen this country before—I lived in it so vividly with Allen. No letter ever came, and I never heard from him until a month ago word came indirectly that he had died out here. Yet, somehow, I seemed to

be living all through my boyhood with him out here."

As they talked they had sauntered up the little stream. In the gathering dusk he saw Daniels cross the stream on a foot-log a hundred yards above, and wondered where he was going.

"Mr. Daniels is going up to the kiva alone," she said, as though answering his thoughts. "He wants to see how it would feel to meet in that sacred council-chamber the ghosts of the past. Isn't that romantic for a lawyer?"

"Is he a lawyer?"

"Yes, from Albuquerque. He knows this country well, and is interested in archeology, so he offered to act as our guide to this cañon."

"He is not an old suitor, then?" Already Ben had felt a tinge of jealousy.

"No," she laughed a bit teasingly, "a very new one. We only met him on the train coming to Santa Fe."

"Undoubtedly you are very tired," he said directly, "and you should be in bed soon." He turned her about and started back for the long log-cabin.

Ten minutes later Ben was slipping up the creek to the steps chiseled in the rock, and the crude ladder that made a possible but precarious climb to the ancient kiva in a shoulder that jetted from the bluff. Ben wanted to see, himself, the ghosts that Daniels was to meet in the dead man's council-chamber.

Hughes approached the foot of the bluff cautiously, under cover of the pine and cottonwood along the creek.

It was a climb of about four hundred feet to the kiva. At three places the precarious path was pierced out by rough ladders that scaled sections of perpendicular cliff.

As Ben stood in the shelter of the dusk among the trees, and scanned the face of the cliff, he saw a man climbing the last ladder which led up to the jutting boulder, in which was the ancient council-chamber. A few minutes later another man climbed after him, and then another.

Hughes waited a quarter of an hour. No other appeared, and he started up the path.

At the foot of the ladder he listened—there was no sound above. He climbed the

last ladder silently, and when near the top raised his head with caution above the level.

There was nothing visible but the long pole which stuck up from the kiva, but there was the sound of indistinct voices. As he had guessed, the men who climbed the ladder had gone down into the kiva; and having no fear of interruption had left no lookout above.

On hands and knees Hughes crept to the edge of the entrance—a mere hole in the ground like an old well. The pole, which projected from the top of the hole for seven or eight feet, was a crude ladder.

There was a dim light, evidently a pocket electric-flashlight, and with their backs against the wall sat three Indians—one of them the young Indian that Hughes had seen that afternoon. The man who was speaking was on the other side of the circular chamber in the dark; the voice was Daniels's.

"Fox Head," he was saying, "you are to be the leader. Get twelve of your young men of the Pueblo, who love fire-water and are not afraid. Bring your guns and gather on the Fenced Mesa at ten o'clock Wednesday night.

"You are a great orator, Fox Head. Make them believe the old man is going to ruin the Pueblo, and tell them what is to be done. You can divide the reward as suits you.

"Remember, the old man is not hunting sacred meal-bowls as he pretends. But he is here to make trouble for the Indians. He wishes to steal the river that waters your fields. The government is not his friend, and he cannot hurt you, for he is afraid, I will protect you.

"He and his daughter are to start to the Pueblo on mules to-morrow. Conchito and Bolero will be their guides.

"Be sure to have in your company on the Mesa the young Indian—'Wind-on-the-Corn.'"

Ben crept away from the entrance—the powwow was nearly at an end—and slipped down the ladder.

The cabin was dark when he returned. The patriarch and his wife who kept it, and the archeologist and his daughter, had already retired. Ben went to the guest-tent

which had been assigned him. The sun was already on the tops of the mountains, and it was broad daylight in the cañon when he awoke, and heard voices. He was dressed and out in a few minutes.

The archeologist and the girl, with the Indian guides, were just starting to climb out of the cañon. On the rim above stood four pack-mules and another Indian.

The girl turned as Hughes approached and her face brightened. She came toward him and held out her hand.

"We are about to be off, and I was afraid I was not going to have a chance to say good-by."

The lumpy woman and Daniels were to return to Santa Fe when the machine came in at noon.

"Father and I are going to take a three weeks' trip through the wilds of the mountains, and will stop at the Indian villages. Father is studying archeological remains, but I'm interested in the live Indians.

"Good-by." He had still held her hand protectingly, and she gave him a little parting pressure, and removed it.

"Not yet," he said, catching step toward the foot of the cliff. "I'm going with you."

III.

"I WONDER why you decided to go on this trip," asked the girl, as they rode through the pine woods toward the Little Bird Creek. The pack-mules, the archeologist and the Indian guides went single file ahead.

"Oh," he answered lightly, "I was afraid I would be lonesome left behind. This friend of yours, your latest suitor—at least next to the latest, Daniels—why did not he come?"

"He has a big lawsuit on hand next week, and he had to go back and get ready for that. There is a dispute between a rich rancher up the valley and one of the Indians. They both claim a tract of land. If Mr. Daniels wins—and he says he will—he is to get twenty thousand dollars."

"He is attorney for the rancher, of course," observed Ben.

"Yes." She looked at him quickly. "But why—of course?"

"Because the Indian is most likely in the

right, and it is the side that is wrong which pays the biggest fees."

The path narrowed, and he dropped in single file behind Miss Lawrence. His mind was busy working out the meaning of that meeting between the lawyer and Fox Head and their two Indian guides.

They came down from the steep mountains to a plain—a plain that itself is seven thousand feet above the sea—and camped that night by a spring where there was grass and cottonwood and aspen along the bank.

The plain glowed red in the setting sun.

"Yonder," pointed the girl, "is the Fenced Mesa. Queer, isn't it, rising up there out of the plain, with its perpendicular walls. There is just one way you can get up to the top, which covers ten or fifteen acres. There is a right thrilling story about a tribe of Indians taking refuge up there when pursued by the Mexicans. And they held out for many days until a traitor in the tribe betrayed the hidden path."

"How far is it from here?"

"Only fifteen or twenty miles."

"And to-morrow is Wednesday," remarked Ben.

"Yes," she laughed, "and to-day is Tuesday. But what has that to do with it?"

"I was merely counting time," he replied, but seriously.

Next morning Ben asked:

"Where are we to camp to-night?"

"At the north edge of the Benton ranch, over yonder at the foot of that little peak." Miss Lawrence pointed it out to him.

"I am not going to travel with you to-day," said Hughes. "But I'll join you there some time to-night or early in the morning."

As soon as the pack-mules were out of sight, Ben turned toward the Fenced Mesa.

At sundown Hughes stirred from the dead grass where he had been lying, and scanned the plain around the mesa for moving figures. Only the dust of a passing rancher on the road below. He had been on the Fenced Mesa since three o'clock. He had had trouble finding the way up—twice he had searched the face of it all the way around before he discovered the one path. The top was covered with chaparral and

dead grass, which afforded plenty of hiding room.

He smiled wistfully, sadly.

"How Allen would have loved this! What a thriller it would have been twenty years ago, if I could have told him that one night I should be hiding here on this ancient bloody spot to spy on a band of outlaw Indians. Poor Allen! I wonder if the flavor of adventure was so sweet to him as he hoped."

Night came! only the stars in that wonderful sky lighted dimly the mesa, and the great earth piles of mountains that loomed west and east. It was very still. One hour, two, three passed. It was ten o'clock. A puff of mountain wind stirred among the dead grass and woofed among the chaparral.

Then at the top of the concealed path on the very rim of the mesa an Indian stood out against the sky. Another and another, as though being coined by the night, slipped into view an instant and vanished. Ben counted fifteen.

There were voices now. They were gathering in a circle under the big rock that rose near the east side.

Ben slipped toward them and got within fifty feet of the circle without betraying his presence. They had built a little fire in the hollow of the rocks, a little fire that dimly lighted the circle but would not be visible out on the plain. It was a solemn council—but there were no old men. In the dim light Ben could see these young bucks were sullen and defiant; some of them fiery in their eloquence. Ben was disappointed that the white man, the lawyer, was not there. It was from his talk he expected to learn the plot.

One after another arose and, standing with the dusk on his head and back, the dim firelight on his face and hands, spoke.

Ben knew almost all of them understood English, for they had been to the government schools; but none of them spoke it here.

Fox Head was the last to speak. Although not understanding a word, Ben knew what he was saying. It was the words of that cunning, shy lawyer, King Daniels, put into the eloquence of the Indian simplicity and fervor.

"What has the white man done for us? He has taken our land, has ruined our homes, has killed the buffalo and the bear. He has broken the spirits of our old men, who sit and smoke as dead men, and take whatever the white man gives them.

"But we are young; we are strong. The white man comes and steals our water. The river will be dried up, we will have to go away, we cannot live. We will not return. The red willows will know us no more; never again will we hear the call of the spring feasts; never will we hear the song of the maidens who come out to greet us."

There was an angry murmur. Ben knew they were almost persuaded. Fox Head began to pass the bottle. There was louder and angrier talk. Ben wished he could understand. But he believed he was beginning to see through Daniels's plot.

His leg cramped under him—a cactus was sticking his ankle. He moved and made a slight noise. Instantly there was silence in the drinking company. Three sprang up with guns in their hands.

Ben's heart beat suffocatingly. For a minute no one spoke. The mountain wind stirred the dead grass and woofed over the rocks. The stars looked down impartially.

Then Fox Head spoke angrily and the three Indians sat down.

Up from the circle rose a young Indian who had not spoken. As he advanced into the firelight, Ben saw he had a high forehead, and a splendid profile, and to his amazement asked in perfect English: "Fox Head, where the white man that gave you whisky and money?"

There was an angry reply, and the young man then continued to speak in the Indian language. Ben, not understanding, was yet moved almost out of himself by the splendid sweep of his eloquence.

But Fox Head had won. With taunts they arose and filed away down the mesa, leaving the last speaker alone.

When the rest were gone Ben emerged from his hiding and spoke to the young Indian left behind.

"Who are you?" The young Indian drew up straight and faced him.

"A friend," replied Ben. "What was it Fox Head planned to do?"

The young Indian stared at him in the dusk a moment, then asked abruptly:

"Where your camp?"

"At the foot of the peak yonder." Ben pointed to the northwest.

"Who there?"

"Only an old man, who is a scholar, his daughter, and two guides."

Even in the dark the young Indian below could be seen swiftly mounting. Bent felt sudden misgivings.

"Why?"

"They say—Fox Head tell them—that the old man is come to steal the water. Fox Head paid to tell lies; he got whisky." Turning his face toward Ben he asked:

"Have you gun?"

"Yes—a revolver." Fear leaped higher in Hughes's heart.

Pointing dramatically toward the peak that marked the camp the young Indian said briefly:

"We ride fast."

IV.

HUGHES and the young Indian were racing across the mesa, their ponies neck and neck.

"They will not hurt them?" Ben asked with hope that he did not feel.

"They drunk," replied the young Indian.

"The whisky came from Albuquerque," commented Hughes.

"Yes," assented the Indian.

"Do you know who stirred up the trouble, and why he did it?"

"No."

Ben was sure now that he did, but did not believe Daniels had plotted actual violence against the archeologist and his daughter. The lawyer had intended merely a sensation to make sentiment for his client. But the Indians were drunk!

They lost half an hour by Hughes not knowing exactly where the camp was; while Fox Head, Ben reflected bitterly, would know through the two Indian guides.

"It was to be at the north edge of the Benton ranch," said Ben.

"I think it will be at north spring," said the guide.

They were on the ranch road now and

following a creek that curved about the foot of the mountains.

Suddenly on the night there was the popping of revolvers and a woman's scream.

Ben's heart pounded so it felt his veins would burst. He leaned forward and whipped his pony to the last ounce of speed.

The camp had been quickly demolished, the tents overthrown and cut into strings, the horses, provisions, and guides were gone.

"What have they done with Mr. Lawrence and his daughter?" Hughes was sick with fear. "They have not killed them, have they?"

"No," replied the Indian, "they have taken them."

Ben jumped and whirled about. A groan had come from the edge of the cottonwoods.

It was the archeologist tied to a tree with a lariat. The old man was shocked and scared into incoherence. The girl was gone.

"I think they take her to Black Rock Cañon. Bad Mexican and Indian live there. You go to Benton's," the young Indian directed, "get help, I follow them."

"No," replied Hughes, "I go with you. We will ride by Benton's and give the alarm, and let them follow later." He took the archeologist up behind him on his own pony.

After a few moments' violent halloing at the ranchman's gate, Benton and another man came out. In the starlight Hughes saw the other man—King Daniels, the lawyer.

"A band of drunken Indians have taken Miss Lawrence captive," he said. "I'll leave Mr. Lawrence here." He had helped the old man to a light. "I am going in pursuit. You fellows get a posse and follow as swiftly as you can; they probably have gone toward Black Rock Cañon."

Without tarrying to answer questions he rode quickly back down the road to join the young Indian, who had waited at the entrance to the ranch.

Not expecting pursuit, Fox Head and his gang slackened their speed, and Ben and his guide gained on them.

When Hughes and the young Indian reached the narrow defile that was the only entrance to the cañon, the hoof-prints were very fresh.

Black Rock Cañon is deep in the fastness of the Jemez Mountains and is wild enough for the most daring crimes. There is a little thread of a stream and a strip of watered land. Two adobe huts stand near the south wall—one occupied by a bad Mexican and the other by a half-breed Indian and his squaw.

It was about three o'clock when Ben and his guide entered the narrow defile; it would be dark three hours yet in this deep cañon.

"Will they shoot?" asked Ben, taking his revolver in his right hand, and riding slowly.

"They drunk," sententiously replied the Indian.

At a crossing of the small stream the Indian dismounted.

"We leave horses here."

For a quarter of a mile they slipped forward very cautiously. Only the dimmest sort of starlight filtered down into the deep cañon, and objects merely stood out as dark outlines.

There came the sound of horses stamping.

"They just ahead, Mexican cabin yonder," whispered the young Indian.

They were fifty yards distant; they could see the Indians standing in front of the adobe hut and heard the Mexican speaking—or, rather, cursing in Spanish.

They crept a little closer. Ben saw dimly an Indian leave the horses carrying something in his arms; it was the girl—it was Anna.

Ben sprang up. The young Indian gripped his arm.

"I go, you stay; they shoot you."

"No," whispered Ben fiercely.

"I go—I Indian," repeated the young man.

"I go, too." Ben walked out in the open, straight for the cabin.

At the first sound the Indians had turned. The one carrying the girl had set her hastily on her feet.

Ben knew that six guns were aimed at them, and that they only waited a word or sign to fire. And they were drunk!

So still was the cañon the purring of the little stream came from the rocks, and a little bird piped sleepily from a clump of aspens.

That fifty yards across the open space

seemed like an endless journey in a feverish dream, but he went straight ahead.

The first word was spoken by the young Indian beside him—something sharp and commanding.

Fox Head replied angrily, warningly.

"Fools," the young Indian broke into English, "the officers are coming, and every one of you will be killed—if you hurt this white man or that girl."

He spoke again in Indian. And Ben saw they had reluctantly, sullenly lowered their guns.

"Anna!" Hughes crossed swiftly to the girl and took her from the Indian, and quickly cut loose the thongs about her wrists and the bandage from her mouth.

She threw her arms up around his neck and fainted.

He laid her on the Mexican bed as they struck a light, and when he had brought her to, he turned to the door. Only the young Indian who had come with him was outside. Fox Head and his gang, sobered by the warnings, had ridden hastily down the cañon to scatter in the night.

"They are gone?" Ben went into the yard to speak to the young Indian.

"Yes." He looked up at the stars, and his profile showed fine as a poet's. Then, nodding toward the door, he asked:

"You love her?"

Ben, suddenly confused, started to laugh, then sobered.

"Yes, I think I do."

"Just like my sister—I love her very much. We live ten miles from here; we take her to my sister."

"All right—if she is able to ride."

She was. She rode in front of Ben, and did not seem at all afraid as he held her in the saddle down the dark cañon.

Just as they emerged a clattering party of horsemen came racing up.

It was Benton and Daniels with three or four of Benton's men.

Daniels jumped off his horse and came quickly to the girl's side. He was thoroughly frightened. The plot had miscarried. He had instructed Fox Head to kidnap the archeologist instead of the daughter.

"I've come to rescue you," he said excitedly.

The girl laughed—not a very complimentary laugh.

"You are a little late, Mr. Daniels. Mr. Hughes has done the job very nicely. I would not have been scared if they had not been drunk. They seemed to think father was trying to steal the water rights or something, and they were going to hold me until he promised to let them alone."

"I guess," remarked Ben meaningly, "Fox Head and two other bad Indians must have met a liar in the kiva at the cañon. This lawyer gave them money and whisky to kidnap Mr. Lawrence and his daughter."

"You see," Ben's eyes were fixed on Daniels, "there is a tract of land exceedingly valuable for water and mineral purposes that belongs to an Indian named Wind-on-the-Corn. A white rancher wanted it, and offered this lawyer many thousand dollars to get it for him."

"The lawyer planned to get Wind-on-the-Corn into a band of Indians who would commit this outrage on these distinguished visitors. That would create such a stir and make such bitter sentiment against the Indian, that the lawyer would have an easy time with the jury."

"Hatching up a thing like that is a pretty serious crime, isn't it, Mr. Daniels? I believe you are a lawyer yourself."

Daniels answered: "I guess it is."

Ben looked meaningly and menacingly at the lawyer as he finished.

"And, Mr. Daniels, wouldn't you advise that lawyer to drop the case?"

Daniels gave signs of swallowing hard, and fumbled the bridle-reins in his hands.

"Yes, I would."

They wanted to take Miss Lawrence back to the ranch, but she insisted on going with Ben and his guide.

It was sun-up when they got to the Indian's house—a big, long log-house, very comfortable, with cultivated fields about it.

The sister, much to Ben's amazement, had blue eyes and red hair. She greeted them with good English and real hospitality.

"My name is Wind-on-the-Corn." The young Indian smiled. In the daylight he also showed traces of white blood. "I am an American citizen, but go with the Indians."

Directly the two girls returned from the kitchen where they had been preparing breakfast.

Ben looked at the sister closely; she was a most intelligent, attractive girl.

"Really, you do not look like an Indian," he remarked curiously.

"No," she laughed. "I took after my father more than Allen did—that," she added as he frowned, "is his English name."

"Allen?" Ben almost jumped from his chair. "Who was your father?"

"Allen Hughes," she replied fondly. "Mother was an Indian, and she, too, is dead."

And when Ben and Miss Lawrence mounted to ride after her father, Wind-on-the-Corn gripped Hughes's hand and glanced up admiringly at the girl.

"You like my father—you will be good to your squaw."

And Ben blushed, but laughed. "If she will let me, I will."

Something worth remembering!

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CHAPTER XXIII.

JUSTICE MOVES.

JUDGE COPLEY leaned back in his chair, smiling. He had the advantage; he would push it mercilessly; his training had taught him to do so. Besides, that tiny cell was perfecting its connection with his central consciousness; it was telegraphing him strange things.

"Sit down, Mr. Anderson," he said almost kindly. "I have not finished. So your son had a reason for wishing to prevent your seeing Mrs. Beck; so had Mr. Marsland; Mr. Bacchus has a reason for wishing to shield both; and the fact suddenly comes over me that I have seen both Mrs. Beck and Mr. Bacchus before."

The judge's final words fell like a bomb-shell upon the group of which Bertha was a part. She dared not look at the others; she dared not give a sign; she could only hope that they did not show their feelings as plainly as she feared she was doing.

"I remember the occasion clearly now," said the judge. "It was a very clear, moonlight night; I was telephoned for; a man had shot himself, the husband, I believe, of Mrs. Beck. The coroner was away; I was acting for him during his vacation. Mrs. Beck swore to the man's suicidal act; so did Mr. Bacchus. They claimed to have been the only ones present; but I noticed a number of overturned chairs." He paused, turned to Anderson.

"I think this matter of your assault will bear further investigation, Mr. Anderson," he said; "and I think we need your son's testimony. We can get out extradition papers, if necessary; but perhaps he will return at your suggestion, by the next steamer."

He paused and turned to one of the court assistants. "Get the papers ready, in any case," he said. He paused again reflectively, gazing at his desk; then he looked up and went on.

"It is just as well," he said, "to make sure of our witnesses. Mr. Bacchus has confessed a misdemeanor, anyway; place him under arrest. I think we will revoke Mr. Marsland's bail. And besides these, we shall need the woman, Mrs. Beck. Start the search for her at once."

He turned to Mr. Anderson. "You have nothing more to tell me, I assume," he said.

Arthur's father raised his head; there was no vestige of color in his face; his eyes were sunken, his lips drawn white.

"Nothing," he muttered as best he could.

"Then you may go," said the judge. "I assume that it will be easy to find you when we want you."

Anderson rose from his chair and got out of the court-room, somehow, passing the other actors in this mystery, unseeing and almost unseen, for each was busy with his thoughts.

This story began in *The Argosy* for February 15.

Bertha seemed to be the only one to notice his departure, and she shrank away as he passed her. What awful thing had he started? What would they do now to keep her father or Arthur from being punished for a crime she was sure neither had committed?

For, of course, the judge's words, the judge's manner, had hinted just that; there was something wrong, and he would find out what it was; he guessed already it had to do with Mrs. Beck and the death of her husband. He had limitless means at his command for discovering facts, or what might seem to be facts.

Bertha felt as if she were alone in some threatening void, facing a grim monster from which there was no escape—the machinery of justice. And yet, at the moment of her utmost loneliness, Welles was leaning over her, bidding her good-by before he should be taken to jail, smiling at her, trying to reassure her, whispering to her words that she only could hear, of encouragement, of hope.

CHAPTER XXIV.

WHAT HAPPENED IN THE STATEROOM.

OUTSIDE the court-room, Henry Baldwin put his hand on Bertha's arm. "My dear," he said, "I cannot bear to think of taking you back to your home now. I want you to come and stay with me and Mrs. Baldwin. You are a strong, brave girl; but you will need an older woman near you now."

Bertha's eyes shone with quick tears of gratitude, but she could not speak for a second—the parting from her father had been too painful.

"If you will wait until I go home and pack some things for myself and for father—" she suggested.

"Of course," replied Baldwin.

They motored back to the house, and Bertha hastily gathered such things as she might need, with the aid of the housekeeper, whose sympathy was as great as her amazement that there had come a time when Edward Marsland would need a trunkful of clothes sent to jail for him.

Mrs. Baldwin, having been warned by telephone of the unpleasant turn of events, was waiting with a tender welcome for Bertha. For two or three days Bertha gave herself up to the kind ministrations of these friends. Then Henry Baldwin came one day with bad news.

Judge Copley was evidently convinced that hasty action was necessary. He had immediately, upon committing Marsland and Welles to jail, applied to the Federal government for the extradition of Arthur Anderson as an important witness in a criminal case.

To offset any chance of his getting away where he could not be found, he had cabled a request to the Argentine authorities to hold Arthur, pending the arrival of his papers. Furthermore, he had cabled to the United States consul to interrogate him.

Arthur's answers to the questions Judge Copley had cabled had been shown to Henry Baldwin. There had been few questions, and the answers were short. Arthur had denied all knowledge of the assault upon his father, and stated that the check for five hundred dollars to Welles was a loan.

Asked about the Mrs. Beck his father had been going to see, he admitted that he knew her; but insisted that he did not care how much his father talked to her. Asked as to where she then was, he admitted that she had come to Argentina on the same steamer as himself.

The United States consul had then immediately been instructed to interrogate her; and she had said she knew of no reason why either Marsland or Arthur should wish to prevent Anderson seeing her; that she knew both of them merely as men who had come to gamble in her husband's rooms; that her journey south on the same steamer with Arthur was purely accidental. But both Arthur and she had waived extradition, and were reembarking that very day for the north.

Within six days, then, Bertha reckoned, she would see Arthur again. Would she have a chance to see him alone; to warn him to be careful; to whisper the word of hope that might save him from making damaging admissions? And then Mrs.

Beck—would she at last have an opportunity to interrogate this woman of mystery; find out what she really meant to her father and to Arthur; to discover what she was doing in her father's room at three o'clock on the morning after the gambler's death?

One day before their ship might arrive, however, Bertha's mind was entirely pre-occupied with a telephone message. The servant who had called her to the phone stated that the person at the other end of the wire would not give his name, and appeared to have a bad cold.

Bertha lifted the receiver and said "Hello!"

The answer startled her; it came over the wire in Welles's voice—Welles, who was supposed to be locked up in the Allerdale jail. Did they permit prisoners to use the phone?

His very first words explained the mystery.

"Don't appear surprised. Don't ask questions, for Arthur's sake. I got out. Go to my office at once; take all mail and telegrams; go to Allerdale, get your car, meet me at the old inn—am there now. Hurry."

Before she could consent or deny Welles had rung off.

With a hasty excuse to explain her possible length of absence, Bertha dressed and went at once to Welles's office.

As his one clerk was well aware of Welles's predicament and his friendship with Bertha, she had no difficulty in getting the letters and telegrams he had requested. She was much surprised to find that there was one for her. It had just arrived, the clerk assured her.

She opened it in the subway going to the Pennsylvania Station, and her heart gave a joyous bound. It was signed "A. A.," so it must be from Arthur. He had telegraphed her from the ship, then.

It was brief and somewhat puzzling, she thought, as she read:

Dare not face trial. No hope. Follow Welles's instructions implicitly, if you love me.

He dare not face trial? Why was he coming back to face it; was on his way?

What did he mean? She was to follow Welles's instructions, if she loved him—and she did.

In less than a couple of hours after Welles had phoned her she reached the inn, and found him watching for her. The door was open on a slit; the minute she reached the point on the road opposite it Welles ran from the house, jumped into the car, and took the steering-wheel out of her hand. Without a word he threw in high speed and dashed along.

This, of course, was necessary, she surmised; Welles wanted to get as far as possible from Allerdale before he said anything—before he was seen.

Finally, a few miles north of the town, he stopped, asked her for goggles and a coat, which she produced from under the seat. Thus partially disguised, he drove along more slowly and began to explain.

"Bertha," he said, "Arthur has no chance. If he returns to Allerdale and appears as a witness in this assault case, he is going to be accused of Beck's murder as sure as we are driving along in this car. And he has decided not to return."

"Not to return! Why, he is on his way!" exclaimed Bertha. "He will be here to-morrow."

Welles shook his head. "He managed to leave the ship at the West Indies—owing to Mrs. Beck's maneuvering, the ship people have not missed him yet—but he telegraphed me in cipher—one that he always used to communicate in. He begged me to get you to come to him, as you promised to do, if such a crisis as this ever arose."

Bertha sank helplessly back among the cushions.

"I can't do that, I can't do that!" she exclaimed. "Oh, why didn't he come on? I'm sure he would have been let off."

"Not a chance of it," insisted Welles. "Much as both Mrs. Beck and I would prefer not to testify, we would have to testify to the truth—at least to what each considered the truth. To save Arthur, I might easily confirm his testimony that I saw a hand placed over the trigger of his weapon, for I jumped up and back and away from the table. But that would implicate your

father, as there was no one else there to do it.

"Now, Mrs. Beck will insist that there was no hand on Arthur's weapon, for she will want to save Mr. Marsland. And, my dear child, a jury will believe a woman above a man every time. Arthur has absolutely no chance.

"He has seen this—so do I—his scheme is best. Let Mrs. Beck come, let her testify that he killed Beck—that will clear your father, will save him. But in the mean time Arthur will live in a foreign country, under an assumed name; you will go to him and help him to endure his exile; I will go, too. In that way, neither will be punished for a deed that one of them must have committed, and that no one deserves to be punished for."

He paused, and drove on more rapidly; Bertha was glad that he did. She had nothing to say—his logic was irresistible. After all, her own plan was not infallible; it had only been a last hope, a desperate chance. It was the best scheme if the matter were brought to trial. But, as Welles had said, the very best thing was that there should never be a trial.

Welles slackened speed again, and went on:

"After getting his cable in cipher, I managed to break out of the flimsy little jail that Allerdale seems to be proud of. I made my way to the inn, as being the last place any one would look for me in, and remembering the telephone in the room where Beck was killed, I managed to get a free call through to you.

"And now tell me, what is it to be? Shall we drive back to Allerdale and I give myself up? Or shall we go on to Huntington, cross to Connecticut, take the train to Boston, and the next ship from there bound for the West Indies?"

He drove on slowly, waiting for her answer.

"Of course we shall not return and give you up," replied Bertha; "that is out of the question. All that you have done has been to help Arthur and us. Whatever happens, you should get away now; and I presume there is no better place for you to go to than to wherever Arthur is.

"But, Welles, I can't make up my mind so quickly as to what I shall do. Let us go on to Huntington, cross over, and take the train to Boston. I shall either leave you there or go on to Arthur. Don't ask me for my decision until we reach Boston."

Welles turned and gave her a look of tender sympathy.

"I won't," he promised; "but please remember this: whatever chance Arthur might have had of clearing himself is ruined now that he has escaped from the ship and gone off like that. When the boat docks, and it is found that there is no Arthur Anderson on board, it will be conclusive evidence of his guilt in the eyes of the law. Nothing can save him after that."

Bertha made no reply, and Welles seemed to expect none. He drove on swiftly, leaving the unhappy girl at his side to the painful reveries and cogitations which his news had started.

Could she abandon her father like this, forever, at a minute's notice? Could she fail to respond to the summons of the man she loved, who needed her so desperately?

They reached Huntington in time to catch the last boat to the Connecticut shore. Over there, they considered themselves in luck that a train was just starting for Boston.

On the train Welles remembered that they ought to be hungry, although each acknowledged that they were not. His face was very pale; there was a kind of desperate, hunted look about him; he seemed watching for some terrible calamity.

Bertha pitied him greatly. A man naturally of a quiet-loving nature, simple emotions, frank and honest, he had been plunged into this vortex of human mistakes merely because of his gratitude to the friend who had saved his life. Left to his own devices, Bertha surmised, he would have found his greatest happiness in unobtrusive ways; he had the air of being a man of few emotions, little inclination for action.

But his devotion to Arthur had cost him his peace of mind, his liberty, and now his right to be considered a law-abiding citizen.

Theretofore, Bertha's mind had dwelt only on her own troubles and perplexities.

Suddenly she felt a great necessity to speak to Welles of his; to express her gratitude, her regret that she and Arthur should be the cause of them.

But he would listen to no regrets. He loved Arthur better than himself. He loved her, too, for Arthur's sake; his eyes glowed as they dwelt tenderly upon her.

In the station at Boston, after they left the train, Welles immediately discovered that the boat for the West Indies would leave the next morning—at dawn, he said; that there were places to be had. He waited, after imparting this information, for her decision.

At that hour—one o'clock in the morning—there were few waiting passengers. But the gloomy, ugly station seemed to Bertha a public place of execution.

She felt that the eyes of a world were on her. Could she go and leave her father; abandon him to an unknown fate? What would be the result of that trial without Arthur there? Could she leave her lover without the consolation of her presence?

Suddenly she made up her mind. The telegram in cipher suggested her decision to her.

"I shall not go with you now, Welles," she said. "I will come later. I must wait until that trial is over. Take my love to Arthur; tell him I shall come as soon as ever I can. Give me a copy of your cipher. We can communicate in that."

Having reached her decision, Bertha felt a sudden need to get away, to go home—or, rather, back to Mrs. Baldwin's, to be held close in her maternal arms, to be sheltered for a little while from great decisions and dramatic moments.

She rose and held out both hands to Welles.

"*Au revoir*," she said, smiling, her eyes wet, however, with unshed tears. "It is only *au revoir*, dear friend, and *bon voyage*. Take good care of my Arthur until I come."

Welles took her hands and held them; he stood gazing into her eyes without replying for a minute, then he said:

"That is your final decision? Nothing will change it?"

Bertha shook her head.

"No. I must stand by my father in this coming ordeal; and I must go to Arthur if he needs me. But I can do both, as you can see."

Welles bowed his head in assent, but still he kept her hands in his.

"Bertha," he exclaimed in a low tone, "what a wonderful thing it must be to be loved by a woman like you!"

Bertha drew back a little; for a moment she felt somewhat ashamed of her deep passion for Arthur, and sorry that there was no one to love Welles as greatly.

"You will be, some day," she said softly, "by some one probably a great deal better than I—because you deserve it."

Welles shook his head.

"I don't want to be," he said; "there couldn't be any one better. Bertha, I may never see you again; or when I do, Arthur will be there; it will be treason to say what I am going to say now—I love you. Don't start; don't be alarmed. I shall not try to win you from my friend; but if you really are as grateful as you pretend to be, I want you to do something for me—I want you to kiss me good-by."

He stopped abruptly. Bertha felt her hands tremble, realized that her eyelids were quivering in a vain endeavor to close beneath his gaze. She could not be angry with him, of course. It was her own fault—she remembered how outrageously she had flirted with him on that New Year's Day, when Arthur had failed to come to her party—the party she had planned for him.

And yet, perhaps, it was not all her fault. Welles was sorry for her great trouble; pity was well known to be akin to love.

At last her eyelids managed to drop over her eyes. She even contrived a wee laugh.

"I would kiss you good-by, Welles dear," she said, "because I know this means nothing—you're just awfully sorry for me—but this is such a public place."

Welles glanced around, as if he realized it for the first time.

"It is," he admitted. "Then do this—drive with me to the pier. You won't mind driving back to the station alone, will you? At the pier I will kiss you good-by."

"Very well," she agreed, not without a feeling that she did not altogether like this arrangement.

She was quite unfamiliar with Boston—the hour was late—not all taxicab drivers are honest.

"Wait until I secure my cabin," said Welles.

There was, it appeared, a place in the station where one could procure one's ticket and reserve one's stateroom.

Bertha waited, growing still more uneasy at the idea of driving back through the streets of Boston alone in the early morning hours.

But Welles seemed so happy at the idea of having this last ride with her that she could not bear to mention the fact to him. She was, however, so preoccupied with it that she did not notice—or rather did not hear distinctly—many of the things he said to her as they drove along.

At the pier he suddenly turned to her with a new idea.

"Let's dismiss this cab and call another," he suggested. "There are four more hours before the boat sails; we can spend them on the deck, chatting; it will be pleasanter for you, because it will be dawn then, and you won't be afraid to go back in a taxi to the station."

Bertha readily consented; she had no sense of loss of sleep, although she was supremely weary; there were many messages she wanted to send to Arthur. She would even have time to write him a letter, such a letter as she could send, would dare to send, in no other way—and in losing Welles she was beginning to feel like the captain of a sinking ship who throws over the last bit of baggage that he had hoped might cause the vessel to right itself.

Welles presented his ticket to the sleepy watchman, and they were permitted to go aboard without questions. Almost immediately Bertha suggested the idea of writing a letter to Arthur, and Welles welcomed it heartily.

"You might as well come down to my cabin," he said, glancing around as they walked along the deck. "It's an old ship—not much chance of a lady's saloon—you'll be more comfortable writing there."

Welles produced a pad and fountain pen when they reached his cabin, arranged a place for Bertha to sit, and placed himself opposite her. He took out his cigarettes and, choosing one, lit it.

Eagerly Bertha began: "My darling, I am coming to you; but not now—some day—" The pencil trailed off the paper, she had a sense of being unable to retain it in her hand. She looked up, startled; Welles was smiling at her through a cloud of smoke, the smoke from his cigarette; he also looked a bit strange, unfamiliar.

She started to her feet. "What is this?" she demanded. She could not remain standing. Suddenly she fell back on the lounge on the side opposite the two berths. She had an idea that Welles also started up, that he threw his cigarette out of the window, which he opened for that purpose, and that in a kind of groping, struggling way, he made for the door, and left her alone.

She made one supreme effort to follow him, to question him, to find out what was wrong, why she couldn't breathe—why the air was so heavy. She got as far as the door and turned the knob weakly, with a last effort; but it wouldn't open. The air seemed to grow heavier. She groped her way back to the window. Welles had closed it again, after throwing away the cigarette. She put her hand upon the sash to raise it, and fell in a heap beneath it, quite unconscious.

CHAPTER XXV.

A STAGGERING DISCLOSURE.

SHE was falling through space, clutching at the stars as she passed, and missing them; all except one, that was unaccountably sticking in her breast—pricking her with its points. She could not see it; she could only feel it. Yet there was light everywhere, an uncanny light, too brilliant, too bewildering.

It was warm, too. It fell chiefly upon her head. She tried to move out of its way, but her limbs were almost as numb as her heart. Only her brain struggled, fought for reality, for something to stay that

dreadful shooting through bottomless void. Somewhere, away back in her consciousness, an idea was struggling for recognition—this thing, or something very like it, had happened to her before.

She managed to move her head; it fell backward; her eyes were looking into the very heart of that all-pervading glow. Suddenly she knew that it was—it was the dawn. She had seen other dawns, but none as bright as this. She jumped to her feet, her limbs unaccountably strong again.

She was standing on something solid, though not stationary. It moved gently, quietly, swayed a little. She stared around. She was in a ship's cabin. The earliest sunbeams were coming in at the port-hole. Beyond a vague landscape was passing by. Within there were two berths, a lounge, a desk—on the latter a sheet of paper with some writing on it.

Memory came leaping back. That was her letter to Arthur. She had begun it in Welles's cabin, just before. She stopped, struggled to grasp all the threads of memory, then ran to the door and tried it. It was securely fastened.

Yes, she had been writing that letter just before Welles had left the room and locked the door behind him. She was locked into that cabin, had been there since one or two o'clock in the morning—alone, huddled in a heap on the floor below the port-hole, to which she had gone for air. It was closed. Plainly she had not had the strength to open it. In trying to do so, she had lost consciousness and had fallen to the floor.

Welles had closed that window; he had locked the door. The ship was moving; it had left port; she was on her way to the West Indies.

She sat down upon the lounge and passed her hand over her brow, but the air was still too heavy. She could not think; she could not reason the thing out. She must open the window first, must breathe again as she had used to do.

She stood there, beside the port-hole, taking deep drafts of the fresh sea air into her lungs.

They could only just have started, she reckoned, if the ship had left at dawn, as Welles had said it would. But had it?

Had it not left much earlier? Would the landscape be as vague as that within half an hour? On such a bright morning?

Every second the land was receding farther in the distance. From Boston, it was quite probable that a ship bound for the West Indies would steam for the sea outside of Long Island—its captain would not bother to go through the Sound.

It was quite reasonable to suppose that that fading landscape was the Long Island shore—that Welles had prevaricated or been misinformed—that the ship had left earlier than he had said it would.

Then why had he lied to her? Why lock her in that cabin? Why do something—what was it—that had forced unconsciousness upon her—that had rendered her helpless? As once before she had found herself—when she had been chloroformed near her own home and taken to that lonely, dreadful inn.

Welles had declared that her father had kidnaped her. Her father said that Welles had done so. She had believed Welles. But what was she to think now—in the face of this adventure?

A sound at the door startled her. Some one was turning the key in the lock—very softly, to be sure—but Bertha's hearing was acute. Just as softly it was withdrawn.

She was free, then; free to leave the cabin—but the ship? If she would, as she had vowed, stand by her father through whatever trials were coming to him, she must return at once. This very day Mrs. Beck would land and be taken into custody as a witness at the assault trial. What might develop then was too terrifying in its possibilities to dwell upon.

She was in a situation that the more she considered it the more impossible it seemed. Welles had forced her to leave for the West Indies, against her will, against her expressed intention. What story he might have told to account for her presence on the boat, she could not imagine. What consequences he must expect from his act, she could not know.

There was a knock at the door. Bertha hesitated as to replying; but the outsider waited only a second for an answer. The door was opened, and a stewardess entered.

"Good morning," she said brightly. "Your brother asked me to come and see if there was anything I could do for you."

"My brother," Bertha repeated vaguely.

The stewardess came forward. She looked around.

"You didn't sleep last night," she said.

Bertha shook her head. Just then she saw the stewardess glancing at the desk.

Bertha began gathering up the blank sheets of paper. "I was writing an important letter," she said; "besides, I am not accustomed to sea voyages. I was nervous."

"That's too bad," sympathized the stewardess; "but you'll get used to the sea. You'll like it."

"But if I don't," suggested Bertha—"if I prefer to leave the ship and continue my journey on land, could I? Does it stop anywhere?"

The stewardess stared at her—and then began to smile.

"Not that I know of," she said. "I never heard of it stopping anywhere between Boston and Bermuda. We're standing right out to sea now. We don't hug the coast at all."

Bertha put her hand to her throat—she felt as if she were choking. No stop between Boston and Bermuda!

"How long will it take to get there?"

"Five days," replied the stewardess.

"And after that," Bertha went on, "how long does it take between Bermuda and the West Indies?"

Again the stewardess stared at her as if she were something of a rare species. "We don't go to the West Indies at all," she said—"just to Bermuda, then back again to Boston. We carry freight, you know. You and your brother are the only passengers."

But Bertha didn't know. She felt that she knew nothing—had never known anything—had never really understood anything. She was on a ship bound for Bermuda, and Arthur was in the West Indies? What could that mean? Unless from Bermuda, Welles intended to take another boat to meet Arthur.

"Please," she said to the stewardess—"please ask my brother to come here. I want to speak to him."

The stewardess moved toward the door. "Would you like your breakfast sent in?" she inquired.

Bertha's first impulse was to refuse all food; but sober second thoughts told her the human machine is not much good without fuel. "Please," she assented.

It seemed an age before Welles appeared—yet it was only a few minutes. He greeted her diffidently—there was in his manner the fear of the consequences of his act. And although she had already exonerated him for his high-handed method, she began in a tone of reproach.

"Surely you don't think Arthur would like you to have me brought to him against his will."

"I have followed my own instinct," Welles replied hastily. "Arthur telegraphed to you to do as I asked you to do. You refused, so I did as I thought best."

Bertha frowned, puzzled how to go on with the conversation. She could hardly upbraid him for his devotion to Arthur. And yet—

"This boat goes to Bermuda?" she asked uncertainly.

"A much prettier place than any spot in the West Indies—a better climate," he said.

"And Arthur will join us there?" she continued.

"I hope so," replied Welles.

"But I cannot understand," insisted Bertha; "I cannot understand. I love Arthur, it is true, but I owe a duty to my father. I told you I would come to Arthur later—yet you resort to trickery to make me go now. Surely you must be crazy!"

This solution did indeed seem the only one. Something, some secret trouble or sorrow—he had always seemed the type to be harboring such a thing—perhaps worry about Arthur's fate—had turned his brain.

"I am not crazy," he replied coldly. "From the beginning I have been determined to repay Arthur for his goodness to me—to this last bit—especially since I met you. Beck—he deserved to be shot long before—saving Arthur from the consequences meant nothing to me; just an opportunity to avoid fuss and trouble.

"But after I met you, the matter was

different. I was determined that you should decide the matter for yourself. Chance—the accidental return of your father brought the matter to a head. It was I who threw a cloth over your face, outside the garden of your home; who took you to the abandoned inn, that you might realize what had happened on that night, and, when Arthur should be accused, be all the readier to decide whether or not Arthur was a murderer. It was I who phoned your father where to find you that he might, on the very spot itself, infuriated by the idea that Arthur had attempted to take you from him, make the accusation which I believed you would not believe.

"I had counted on your faith in the man you loved. But, after all, you would not abandon your father for his sake."

He rose as if he had little more to say. "I did not really know you. Realizing that at last, I decided to take you away. I would rather you went of your own accord. But I had promised Arthur to take you to him. I have never failed him. I shall not fail him now.

"When we reach Bermuda you will be free to return to America. I could not hold you if I would. But"—he paused and continued impressively—"remember this. It was not Arthur who killed that gambler. It was your father. I saw him put his hand on Arthur's pistol. And, furthermore, I know his motive for killing the man. Mrs. Beck was your father's mistress."

An inarticulate gasp came from Bertha.

"Oh!" she cried weakly, then fell silent, her face a frozen mask, drained of all color—white as death itself. As in some nightmare of unreality she heard, dully, as from an infinite distance, the inexorable voice, going on and on.

"And she was so devoted to him," the voice went on, "that, although she was on the verge of collapse, she walked two miles to your house, and put your father's pistol in his desk to avoid its being found by the coroner. With these facts brought to light, Arthur's testimony and mine, Edward Marsland hasn't the ghost of a chance."

He moved away, and stopped beside the door.

"Stay in Bermuda and wait for Arthur,"

he said, "and they will never find me, to get my evidence for either of them. Return, and I will go back, too, and testify that your father is the real murderer. Think it over."

He turned the knob and walked out, without even a backward glance at the girl on the lounge.

For a long time Bertha did not move. She sat there, holding fast to the edge of the couch, staring in front of her at nothing.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE FACE AT THE PORT-HOLE.

SHE was existing in a vast void—that might be either space or eternity made visible—but she was all alone in it.

To be sure, immediately beneath her feet there was something that seemed fairly solid, even when it swayed and rocked. There were strange, rough sailors, a taciturn man who spoke harshly to them, a brusque woman who waited on her—so manly that she might as well have worn trousers. But they seemed persons of another world—queer, uncanny shapes, with hideous visages that suddenly loomed up at her out of the great, gray nothingness that surrounded the seemingly lost ship.

A wonderful pale gold shone through the general grayness sometimes—dim, ghostly shapes that suggested other ships passed noiselessly by, afar off—so far, she asked herself were they fantoms or not?

Something had gone wrong with the world. All that she had known and loved had disappeared—had ceased to exist, apparently. All that she had believed in, it seemed, was not—perhaps had never been.

Food was placed before her, and she ate—mechanically. People spoke to her—and she answered, having no notion of what she said. Welles seldom approached her, except for the sake of appearances.

But whenever he did, the unreality of things vanished. In the glance he cast upon her she saw the question asked continuously: What would her decision be—would she wait in Bermuda for her fiancé, or return to New York to help her father?

Welles had seemed a giant of generosity, of gratitude. Now she wondered what notion really animated him in his extraordinary devotion to Arthur. Their first meeting came back to her—he had said then that he resented Arthur's favors—she had been amused by his point of view. Now she understood how the matter had preyed upon his mind until he was willing and ready to do anything to repay a debt that was obnoxious to him.

But whatever his motive, Bertha had but one thought, one hope—to get off the ship and back to America. If Arthur were in Bermuda, waiting for her, she would make him see that she must go back to her father; if he were not there, then she would go, anyway.

She was really having a calm voyage, although, to her, it seemed some abnormal experience that she would presently escape from, as one wakes from a nightmare.

Within twenty-four hours of Bermuda, Welles renewed his pleading. He managed a lonely interview upon the deck.

"I have been somewhat theatrical," he began, in a sort of apologetic manner, "in my way of dealing with you. But the circumstances warranted it. I knew there was no time to lose—that if you did not go to Arthur now, you never would. And that if you failed him, you would never forgive yourself."

His voice ceased abruptly, but Bertha made no reply. In the silence Welles lighted a cigarette. Presently he went on:

"To-morrow we reach Bermuda. I shall not attempt to make you stay. You will be as free as air—to return to America. There are many things I might urge which would bias your decision, but I shall not mention them. I believe you will think of them for yourself. The greatest is your love for Arthur—his for you."

He rose and threw the cigarette over the side of the ship, bowed, and walked off. His manner was that of a man who had no real interest in her decision.

And Bertha wondered if really the solution of the whole matter was not that he was insane—and she wondered until the end of the trip.

Signs of land began to accumulate—

gulls, hungry-eyed, hovered over the ship—the gray void grew pink, then blue—there were indefinite shapes in it. Toward morning the loveliest island of the Atlantic began to grow distinct.

It was impossible that she should sleep. Occasionally during the hideous nights of that unbelievable voyage she had dozed off, but on this last night there was no question of sleeping. Dressed and ready for whatever might offer itself, she waited—hollow-eyed, lined, gray of skin, old in experience, anxiety, and sorrow.

An hour after dawn the ship docked. Bertha had already found out that its sister ship would leave the following morning for Boston. Entirely unfamiliar with the enchanted isle, or the means of getting away from it, she concluded that, if Welles kept his word and failed to interfere with her plans, she would be able to get on the other ship to America.

The stewardess, it developed, could attend to engaging her return passage—she had money with her, had taken the precaution of procuring a good deal from the bank on the day that Welles had asked her to meet him.

An hour after the boat from Boston had docked, there was no question about Arthur being there to meet her. He had not come—Welles had to admit it himself. He made a final effort to induce her to await her fiancé's arrival, but she would not listen to him. Feeling that Welles's insanity might now have reached a point when he could no longer be trusted in the simplest matter, she doubted if he really were sure that Arthur even would come to Bermuda.

Locked into her cabin on the other boat, she waited in such anxiety for its departure that there was no question of her noticing the lovely aspect of the island she was destined merely to glimpse and never to see again.

If Welles kept his word—and he had parted from her very casually—she would see no more of him, unless he appeared in America to testify against her father. If he should so testify, what would be the result?

The day—the twenty-four hours—that had to pass before she left the island

dragged away without a sign of him. And in spite of herself, during the night that the ship lay in port, Bertha's tired nerves could not refrain from sleep.

It was morning again, therefore, when she awoke. Some loud noise had startled her. Thankfully she realized that it was the shriek of the ship's whistle as they got under way as they left the harbor.

The view from the port-hole proved that they were passing rapidly away—back to America—to Boston. It would take five days to get there, a half day to reach Allerdale. In the mean time, what might have happened? Ten or eleven days would have passed without news of her father.

But whatever might have happened, in the mean time she would have the heart to endure, to help him through, she felt. Outside, the void no longer looked gray, but golden—full of hope, of courage.

Welles had made no sign. Doubtless his threats had been idle talk. He would not go so far. It had been, indeed, a case of "the attempt, but not the deed," confronting him. At the last he had lost heart.

He loved Arthur, of course, with a most extraordinary devotion—but he dared not testify against her father—for her father was innocent and he knew it.

He had left the ship when she did and gone to a hotel—he would stay away from America—she would invent some excuse for her ten-days' absence—some day, some time, if the mystery were ever cleared up, she would communicate with him in cipher, she and Arthur would meet, they would have their life together, they would show their gratitude to Welles—but not at her father's expense!

In the mean time—there were five days and she would be in Boston—in America—she would know what had happened to her father. Five days, during which she might rest, might forget some of the hideous part of the affair, might regain strength for the ordeal that she felt must be ahead of her.

She got herself into the apology for a peignoir that the stewardess had hastily purchased for her, and prepared to make herself comfortable for the remainder of the trip. She had not been seasick on the voy-

age out there—and as it had been her first sea-trip, she felt reasonably sure that, quite unsuspected, she must be a "good sailor."

She rose at this point in her cogitations and looked out of the port-hole. A lovely, vanishing landscape met her gaze—then a shadow crossed between it and her—a shadow that developed into a face.

The face was Welles's—exactly in front of the port-hole he paused and smiled in at her.

CHAPTER XXVII.

LIGHT IN DARKNESS.

SOMETIMES she felt as if she had never been anywhere except on that slow-moving boat—that all that had gone before was a dream, too beautiful to last—her quiet life in Allerdale, her romance with Arthur. Sometimes she felt that only that had been real, this was a nightmare.

A storm occurring on the second day out, she went definitely to bed and stayed there for the rest of the trip. After that glimpse of Welles outside the port-hole she saw no more of him—she might have thought that she had merely imagined she saw him, if she had not made cautious inquiries and learned that he really was on board.

He made no attempt to see her or communicate with her, but he was going back—as he had said he would—to testify against her father, to accuse him of a crime.

When she left the ship and hurried across Boston to the train for New York, she saw nothing of him. She resolutely refrained from reading the papers, and she dared not use the telephone to inform her father—who must be half-dead with worry about her by this time—that she was all right. She contented herself with telegraphing: "Am quite well—will, be home in a few hours—Bertha."

As a matter of fact she did arrive shortly after her telegram was received. But her father was not there to welcome her. She found only the discreetly amazed and puzzled housekeeper, who had naturally a great deal to tell her.

Her disappearance had roused a furor, of

course, and the fact that Welles had broken out of jail on the same day had convinced every one that they had eloped together. Both her father and Arthur were so sure of this the housekeeper told her that neither of them had attempted to search for her.

Her father and *Arthur!* Bertha's mind stuck, amazed, on this information. *Arthur!* Why, he was somewhere in Bermuda, the West Indies—

But the housekeeper knew better—he had duly arrived on the steamer from South America.

Then he hadn't left the ship—he had changed his mind—his better nature, his innate courage had forced him to return and face whatever ordeal might be in store for him.

How glad she was that she had come back, then—how thankful! If she had remained, waiting for him, in Bermuda, as Welles had crazily insisted, she would have helped no one.

The fact that he was said to believe that she had eloped with Welles, Bertha could not for a minute believe—it was just newspaper talk.

The housekeeper had further information—in persisting with the trial for assault Anderson had roused the judge's suspicions. In attempting to get at all the facts, Copley had forced Mrs. Beck to admit that her husband had not committed suicide—that the pistol she had said was his really belonged to Arthur. Copley had immediately accused young Arthur of the crime, and he had retorted by accusing Marsland.

Further interrogated, Mrs. Beck had insisted that she did not know whether Arthur had pulled the trigger, or whether, as he insisted, Marsland had put his hand over Arthur's and set the weapon off.

But Arthur had insisted that the hand had first tried to get his pistol away from him, and that he had held on to it, fearing that some one else besides the gambler wished to harm him.

There was a great deal in the newspapers, of course; the housekeeper had carefully kept every word printed on the subject—she offered the articles to Bertha diffidently, feeling that no part of her training had fitted her for such a situation as this.

But Bertha took the papers eagerly, thankful that the housekeeper had kept them—not for her, of course, for the woman plainly had never expected to see her again.

The newspapers, Bertha quickly realized, had no shadow of a doubt that she and Welles had deceived Arthur—that she had eloped. It was with somewhat the air of being glad of feeling sure about something in the puzzling case that they insisted upon this—for no one could formulate an opinion about the murder.

Beck had been shot by Arthur's pistol—but whether he or Marsland had pulled the trigger was a matter no one could decide. The points against Arthur were the fact that the pistol was his, and that Marsland insisted he had fired it off.

The points against Marsland were more numerous. He had acted suspiciously, to begin with—he had got out of the way at once and stayed away—in Panama, Bertha now learned for the first time, for months, without communicating with his own daughter.

Arthur was practically a stranger to the Becks—but Marsland knew them well—had fairly supported them for years—the gambler apparently had blackmailed him into doing so. As soon as Anderson had shown the intention of finding Mrs. Beck and getting at the truth about her husband's death, Marsland had sent the woman away—he had engaged her passage on the ship, cautioned her to speak to no one on board.

The fact that Welles probably knew which of the men had actually shot Beck, and that he had eloped with Bertha, also was a point against Marsland, the newspapers argued. For Bertha had plainly assisted her father to get away on the night of the murder—the ticket-agent at the station in Allerdale recalled her being out with her car at five o'clock in the morning, noticed that she looked very tired and worried.

The reporters had been very active, of course—had interviewed everybody who might have anything to say in the matter—or tried to. Mrs. Beck would not speak to them, Henry Baldwin refused to say any-

thing, but the night-watchman and the elevator man in his building were loquacious. They recalled distinctly that Mrs. Beck had come to Baldwin's office at six o'clock in the morning—that Bertha arrived almost immediately afterward.

Marsland's daughter, therefore, the reporters argued, probably believed that her father was guilty, had done all she could to save him—and now when the matter was coming to the light, had eloped with the one witness who could have settled the question—not because she was in love with him—for she appeared to have been very genuinely in love with Arthur—but she had gone off with Welles, doubtless, to prevent his testifying against her father.

The reporter who had formulated this theory was so pleased with the picture he had conjured up of Bertha's great sacrifice of her real love to a false one in order to save her beloved parent that he wrote on about the beauty and charm of this wonderful heroine whom he had never seen, for several columns—and as there was no photograph of her to be had, he had a sketch made of an unbelievably lovely female who bore no slightest resemblance to Bertha, which, labeled: "The rarely beautiful daughter of a possible murderer," pushed everything else off the front page of several "extra editions."

There was a final paragraph that Bertha did not overlook, to the effect that the Marsland servants were as incommunicative as his lawyer.

The housekeeper was proud of that paragraph—Bertha raised her eyes and saw her watching eagerly, to see the effect of it upon her young mistress.

Bertha's eyes filled with quick tears of gratitude—she grasped the woman's hand in hers with sincere warmth.

"And now," she said, "I want you always to think of me as your friend, please! You have had more faith in me than my own father—it is wonderful. I did not elope with Mr. Bacchus—he practically kidnapped me, but I am not angry with him. I think his brain has been turned by this trouble about Arthur. I got back, anyway, that's all I care about.

"When I have time I shall be able to

convince every one that I did not elope. But just now I have other things to do—and you must help me. I want you to be my shadow until this awful thing is over. I don't want to be alone for a minute. And, first, I must see Judge Copley—he will be home at dinner now—I want to go there at once. Please tell William to get the car out, and get ready to come with me!"

"You don't want to see your father—Mr. Anderson, first?" suggested the housekeeper.

Bertha shook her head. "They will have to wait—what I shall do will convince them of the truth—that I did not go away willingly with Welles Bacchus."

When they reached the judge's house Bertha did not ask to be announced—she intended to run no risk of being refused—but walked straight into the dining-room, followed by the housekeeper.

At sight of her the young judge sat back in his chair, and his new bride exclaimed in surprise. She had known Bertha for years, of course—and there was no one could have had more sympathy with the girl—for she was very much in love with her young husband, very proud of him, and she had always liked Bertha.

The reporter's theory that Bertha had sacrificed her love for Arthur and tried to save her father by eloping with the only witness against him, had appealed very warmly to her romantic notions. She had never expected to see Bertha again—and her sudden reappearance was in the nature of a shock.

The judge rose politely and offered chairs to his guests.

"I was expecting to see you," he said. "Welles Bacchus has just given himself up and is back in jail!"

"Have you seen him?" Bertha asked. Her heart was pumping wildly—she was glad to sit down.

"Yes," replied Copley. "He came straight to me."

"And what did he say?"

"He told me you had tried to get him to go away so that he could not appear as a witness, if either Arthur Anderson or your father were accused of having killed Beck!"

"And do you believe that?" asked Bertha.

"I cannot say," Copley replied slowly. "It would have been a natural thing to do."

"Perhaps," replied Bertha—"if I feared whatever testimony he might have to offer. But, as a matter of fact, I do not. And I did not ask Welles to go away—he practically kidnaped me, to take me to Arthur, who, he imagined, was to meet us in Bermuda."

"I have been there and back. After he got me on the ship he confessed that once before when some one chloroformed me and took me to—to the inn" (she tried to add "where Beck was killed," but could not) "that it was he. He said he had wanted me to decide for myself about Arthur—wanted me to hear my father accuse him in the room where Beck was—and that, as I continued to believe in Arthur, he saw only one solution—take me to him—and let father defend himself as best he could!"

Bertha paused, and the judge gave a slight nod. "He said practically the same thing to me—except that he claims that you asked him to elope with you—and that he did go away with you, but that his conscience began to bother him, and he came back."

Bertha smiled half-pityingly. "I am afraid he is crazy—it is the only theory that will account for the wild things he has done—because, of course, it was he who had Mr. Anderson stopped on his way to see Mrs. Beck—he told me so himself."

The judge nodded again. "Yes, we have proved that definitely, but he says now that all he wishes is to see justice done—and he emphatically accuses your father, Bertha!"

"I knew he would!" replied the girl, her face paling a little at the definite statement of the fact that her father actually now was accused of the worst crime in the world!

"But, as I said before, I consider what he has to say extremely unimportant. And I believe—if you will let me—that I can prove to you that Arthur tells the truth when he says another hand than his pulled the trigger of his pistol—and that my

father also tells the truth when he says that it was not his hand!"

"Then whose was it? What is your theory?" demanded Copley.

"I don't know whose it was," answered Bertha; "but if you will let me, I believe I can find out—that we can find out together. Will you help me? I shall not ask you to do anything that would be contrary to your duties as a judge—in fact, the thing I am going to ask you to do has often been tried in order to make the real criminal confess."

"Won't you do this thing for me? I want to save my father—" Her voice began to choke. "I want to save Arthur—I love them both so much!"

Her voice broke—she had to bite her lips to keep the tears back. For she knew that her theory was indeed only a theory—and yet there seemed nothing else to do to save her father.

There were tears in young Mrs. Copley's eyes, too—she would have added her plea to Bertha's, but a lump in her throat prevented her. There was, however, no necessity for this. Copley was only too anxious to learn the truth in this puzzling matter, to help Bertha in every way.

"I will do anything in reason," he assented quickly.

"Then," Bertha went on, "I want you to have everybody who was in the room the night that Mrs. Beck's husband was shot brought to the inn—I want to be there, and I want you to be there, of course. I am going to ask you to have them arrange themselves around the table just as they were when the lights were put out—then when every one is so arranged, I want you to sit where the man did and snap the lights out."

She stopped suddenly, waiting for his assent.

"And then?" he asked quietly.

Bertha drew her breath in sharply. "And then," she went on, "we shall know the truth."

"Which," said the judge, "you believe you know already." He took out his watch and glanced at it. "We might just as well do it to-night," he said. He got up and went out of the room—they could hear him

telephoning the necessary orders at the instrument in the hall.

Mrs. Copley jumped up impulsively. "I am going, too," she said to Bertha. "You may need me."

Bertha nodded, unable to speak. Now that the actual moment was arriving that she longed for and yet dreaded, she felt that it was going to be an ordeal wherein she would, indeed, need every one who would be a friend to her.

The judge timed their departure so that they reached the old inn after the officers had arrived there with their prisoners. They were standing around the room when Bertha and Copley led the rest in, the policemen guarding the doors and windows and exchanging remarks about matters that were quite remote from the affair in hand—acting and talking, in fact, as if they were the only persons present.

Mrs. Beck was standing near Marsland—in her dark dress she looked older, more haggard than when Bertha had seen her before. She was standing there, looking at Bertha's father, an agony of silent appeal in her dark eyes—but he seemed to be paying no attention to her.

With his arms folded he stood there, his gaze fixed upon the table in the center of the room. Arthur had drawn as far away from all of them as possible—he seemed fascinated, though, by the sight of Welles. He was looking at him, as if he saw him for the first time in his life.

Welles Bacchus seemed the only one who felt at ease. He had righted one of the chairs that had never been touched since that night when Beck was killed, and, seated in it, his legs crossed, he was quietly smoking a cigarette. He seemed to be interested in no one present.

As the judge entered the policemen stopped their chatter—one of them touched Bacchus on the arm, and he stood up quickly. Arthur's glance traveled to the door—he gave a slight start as Bertha entered, but he made no attempt to greet her. Instead, he fixed a contemptuous gaze upon her sweet face, which she quietly ignored.

Judge Copley strode into the room and faced Welles.

"Mr. Bacchus," he said, "Miss Mars-

land makes a serious charge against you. She states that you kidnapped her!"

"And you have brought us here to listen to this charge?" asked Welles with indifference and a touch of sarcasm.

"No," replied Copley, "not just for that reason—I have several others. It has occurred to me that I would like to have the actual scene of the murder rehearsed, with the actual actors in it!"

A low cry punctuated the judge's sentence—it came from Mrs. Beck. Marsland turned and looked sharply at her, in a kind of rebuke, it seemed to Bertha—or was it a warning?

"Very interesting," Welles was saying in reply to the judge. "Shall we have the same pistols?"

Copley frowned—but made no reply to Bacchus. He turned around to Arthur and Marsland. "Sit where you were seated on that night," he said abruptly to each in turn.

Marsland crossed swiftly to the other side of the room and seated himself. Arthur followed. As he stooped over to pick up the chair that had lain on its side ever since the night when his hasty exit had thrown it into that position, Bertha saw a strong shudder pass through him.

Copley repeated his order to Welles—then he turned to Mrs. Beck.

"You were not seated? I believe," he said shortly.

"No," she replied in a tone of such sick fear that Bertha felt suddenly sorry for the woman—and for the first time. Theretofore she had had the feeling that whoever she was, whatever the men might have done, this dreadful tragedy was due to her. But to-night she looked so pitifully helpless—was evidently so torn by conflicting emotions that Bertha began to realize what all this awful thing must have meant to her—how dreadful it must have been was evidenced by her being ill for months with brain fever.

"Where were you," the judge went on, "when the lights went out?"

"I—I was standing beside my—my husband," she replied in a tone so low he had to go closer to her to hear, and Bertha could barely catch the words.

Copley stooped down, picked up the fourth chair and seated himself. "Come here!" he said to Mrs. Beck. "Stand as you were standing then!"

She crossed obediently, but as if she were dragging her feet—she put her hand out timidly and placed it on the judge's back. "I—I was just taking hold of his collar," she said in explanation to Copley—"I was going to pull him back, if I could, and get his pistol. B-but I—I couldn't do it!"

Her voice broke suddenly on the last words—without warning she began to weep violently.

Copley raised his hand in a quick gesture. He turned to the woman and spoke roughly to her. "That won't do now!" he said. "Stop it!"

Then he began feeling under the table for the electric push-button. With his finger on it he raised his eyes and looked inquiringly at Bertha.

For a moment it seemed to Bertha that all sounds in the world ceased—that there was nothing in the universe but a blinding light in which sharp, eager eyes were watching her, looking for a chance to hurt her—to kill her!

"Wait," she exclaimed in a choked voice, "just a minute!"

Copley waited, saying nothing. There was no sound save the labored breathing of Mrs. Beck.

Then Bertha took a step nearer to the table.

"Arthur," she said, turning to him imploringly, "will you please hold your hand out in the way you were holding the pistol that night?"

He made no reply, and Bertha addressed herself to the judge: "Will you give him something to hold, as if it were the pistol?"

The judge turned to one of the policemen. "Give him your stick," he said.

Arthur took the wooden weapon from the officer, and raised his arm, pointing at the judge.

"Now!" said Bertha breathlessly.

It had been arranged that Copley was to turn the lights out and leave them out until Bertha told him to turn them on.

He pressed the button and waited.

In the darkness, even the sound of Mrs.

Beck's stifled sobs ceased—every one seemed to have stopped breathing.

"My God!" The exclamation broke upon the strained silence like an explosion. It was Arthur who had cried out.

Just as he must have done on that eventful night, he jumped to his feet, knocking his chair over.

Without waiting for Bertha's assent, Copley turned the lights on. Arthur was the only one who had moved. He was standing back from the table, staring around, a kind of horror in his eyes.

"Why did you cry out?" demanded Copley sharply.

"Because—that ring—I felt it again!" exclaimed Arthur.

"The same ring?" asked Copley quickly.

"I think so—," replied Arthur.

"What was there about that ring that would cause you to identify it so clearly, just the general feel of it?" Copley went on.

"Not that," answered Arthur, with equal rapidity. "But it was a large ring with such sharp points on it, whether from chasing or not, I don't know, and one of Beck's shots hit it—tore a piece out of it—it scratched my hand as the other hand struggled for the pistol and I felt that torn edge just now."

Copley turned sharply to Bertha.

"Is this what you expected?" he asked.

Bertha inclined her head—she was afraid to attempt speech—the success of her experiment had been too great.

"Then," said Copley, "the important thing is to examine the hands of every one in this room until we find a ring that answers Mr. Anderson's description." He turned to give the order to the officers—but Bertha interrupted him.

"That is unnecessary," she said in a faint voice. "The ring is here." She held out her hand. "It was my hand that Arthur felt on his just now."

As she spoke she stepped forward toward the judge.

"Perhaps you had better take this now," she suggested. "I found it in this room—it had rolled under a bit of the matting on that side of the table where Arthur sat."

She drew it slowly from her finger and held it out.

Copley took it from her and turned it over. He glanced up at Mrs. Beck.

"Have you ever seen that ring before?" he asked quietly.

She was still standing in the position she had claimed to be in when Beck was shot—now her hand slid down to the back of the chair Copley was seated on—she grasped the top bar for support—her face was no longer even pale—it had a greenish hue.

"I have seen it—often," she averred.

"On whose hand?" demanded Copley.

"Welles Bacchus's," she replied.

No one moved or spoke—it seemed to Bertha that her mind would never take in the fact that Mrs. Beck had given Welles as the owner of that ring.

"Then you know Mr. Bacchus well?" asked the judge.

"Very well," replied Mrs. Beck, a bit of color creeping back into her face—"he and my—my husband were friends of long standing—or enemies, rather. They had been friends until they quarreled over the profits of a—a place they were running together in the West. My husband treated Mr. Bacchus very badly, cheated him out of everything, left him to die in a desert. He—he"—she turned imploringly to the judge—"he doesn't deserve to suffer for this—it was revenge, it was just revenge!"

"And you knew all this and said nothing!" exclaimed Copley. "You knew that the lives of two innocent men were at stake, and yet you concealed the fact that you knew who had really done this thing?" He rose from his chair, frowning.

"I did not know," Mrs. Beck hastily interposed—"not until Mr. Anderson cried out, as he did just now, did the truth dawn upon me—not until I saw that ring did I know. And now I know exactly how it happened. It was a night of wonderful moonlight—when my husband put the lights out there was still light enough to distinguish forms—I saw—out of the corner of my eye, naturally, for I was engaged, trying to get my husband's pistol away from him. I saw one of the three men at the other side rise and go behind Arthur—it must have been Welles, and afterward—"

She stopped abruptly and looked around as if for help.

Suddenly the sympathy for this poor woman that had gradually been increasing in Bertha's feelings told her what to do. She pushed forward the chair that Copley had been sitting in, and helped her into it.

"And afterward—" persisted the judge.

Mrs. Beck shuddered down into the chair—she averted her eyes and went on, as if talking to herself.

"And afterward there was all that blood on his hand, his right hand, it was trickling down under his sleeve—my husband was aiming at Arthur's hand—he shot Welles instead, because he got in the way."

Her voice trickled out into silence, her head dropped forward.

Copley glanced sharply across the table at Welles, who had with perfect sangfroid remained silent, a slightly increased pallor the only indication that he realized that he was being accused of murder.

"Have you anything to say?" the judge asked.

Welles took the cigarette out of his mouth.

"Nothing," he said calmly, "except that I would like to point out to Miss Bertha Marsland that her sister has fainted."

"My sister!" Mrs. Beck had fainted—already Mrs. Copley and the housekeeper were attending to her—Bertha glanced at her father. Mrs. Beck her sister? What incredible statement was this?

Marsland did not return her look—he gazed across the table at the poor woman who seemed almost to have parted with this life.

"It is quite true," he said in a low tone. "Alice Beck was my first wife's child." Each syllable was uttered with an even, bitter emphasis.

"—who ran away with a notorious crook," Welles went on—"who would never have married her if I hadn't made him do so. It was to keep this disgrace hidden that Mr. Marsland paid my friend such large sums of money." He turned, smiling to the judge.

"I am a harmless individual, really," he said—"never before have I done any active wrong against anybody. But the touch of Miss Marsland's fingers aroused whatever latent evil there was in me. At

first I did not want Arthur to be accused of a crime I knew he did not commit—then, when I wished to take her from him, I was anxious only that her father should be considered guiltless. Then, when I realized that she had not wit enough to care for me, I was determined to have my own way, or make her suffer.

"Nothing else mattered. I realize how every one idealized me—it was amusing while it lasted, but I am glad it is over—nothing is so irksome as standing on a pedestal you don't belong on."

He paused abruptly, and his face darkened. "I did everything in the world to win her," he said. "I lied, I betrayed my best friend—I kidnaped, I perjured myself—and I lost. And now," he added, "I think all the cards are on the table. My immaculate friend, Arthur Anderson, has unconsciously proved his own innocence, and he knows now how deeply grateful I was to him for saving my life.

"He also thinks that the woman he loves eloped with me—and now that she had done me the favor to put my life in jeopardy, I think I ought to confess that I did indeed kidnap her. I suppose when you get through electrocuting me, I shall have to stand trial for that. Oh, and I would like to add—because it seems rather the height of irony that the ring that has been my undoing was a birthday gift from Mrs. Beck—a token of gratitude."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

AFTER STORM—

AGAIN Bertha felt that she was drifting through space—but this time the beings who moved softly through it were not threatening, portentous of disaster. They seemed luminous beings from another world—or had she gone to their world? It was a soft, gentle space that gradually developed into something more substantial—a wide, white bed whereon, with some surprise, Bertha found that she could move.

It took a long time for this idea to occur to her—it seemed so peaceful just to lie perfectly still, and, from underneath half-closed lids, gaze, without thinking, at that

part of the general luminosity that so often developed into tender, loving faces, with the kindest eyes in the world.

They were strange faces, and yet Bertha felt they belonged to her—that she had been searching through thousands of years for them—through long, dark, ugly dangerous woods—on high, rolling seas. She tried to mention this fact, but instead of speaking she cried.

She cried for a long time, gently, while soft hands soothed her, soft voices begged her to be happy.

And she was happy—she tried to tell them so, but it was too difficult. She was crying because she was happy, because she had escaped from some dreadful place into this peaceful world.

It was a queer, shaky treble that she heard—but it was hers—it came up out of her from somewhere—where? Her mind drifted off on this puzzle, and she had to be reminded that she had wanted to say something.

For a long time she could not decide what it was she had wanted to tell them—there were so many things—one of them was to warn them never to leave this peaceful world, never to go to that place that she had so miraculously escaped from, where wicked beings wait to devour you.

And then she wanted to tell them how badly she had been hurt—some one, some one she had loved, had hurt her. She had loved him a great deal, too—she had had faith in him—she had had the purest friendship for him. But he had only wanted to hurt her, all the time he had planned and schemed and plotted to hurt her, to hurt those she loved.

And they had hurt her, too—those others—they had believed lies about her—they thought her bad, selfish, deceitful, and she had never thought harm of them, no matter how wrong they had ever seemed to be. They were gone now, lost in the remoteness of that other world—she would never see them again. But, never mind, she had saved them!

Saved them—from what?

Suddenly her mind seemed to open—she started up in bed and looked around her. One of those luminous beings who had been

coaxing her to talk, she knew, knew her well—why, she was Arthur's mother! The other one—Mrs. Baldwin—this was Mrs. Baldwin's apartment.

She slid down the pillow—she was too weak to sit up.

"I have been ill?" she asked in a tone that told them she was conscious at last.

"Very ill," said Mrs. Anderson gently, "and for a long time—but everything is all right now, and all you have to do is to get well."

"Arthur!" the invalid suggested—a flood of terrible memories suddenly overwhelmed her.

"You shall see him to-day, if you want to," replied his mother, "and your father, too. They are both—free!" She choked a little over the word. Then she hurried on: "Welles saved a lot of trouble by confessing—and was sentenced to imprisonment for a term of years. Arthur knows you never eloped with Welles—and he is waiting, overwhelmed with shame, to beg you to forgive him!"

Suddenly the mother in her gave way—

(The End.)

she fell down on her knees beside the bed and drew Bertha sharply into her arms. "My dear, brave girl," she sobbed, "you saved my boy—how dearly I shall always love you!"

"And my sister—" Bertha suggested after a minute.

"She is perfectly happy now," Mrs. Baldwin answered over Mrs. Anderson's head. "If Welles had got a different sentence, I think it would have killed her—she is really fond of him, insists that his treatment at the hands of her husband really did turn his brain—and, of course, the kind of exposure he went through in that lonely desert might easily do such a thing. And now, deary, you mustn't talk any more—if you want to be permitted to see any one else."

If she wanted to see any one else? Suddenly she knew she couldn't wait another minute—she had to touch him, to be sure that he still existed, still loved her. They just caught the name breathed through her lips as the tears of entreaty welled to her eyes.

Queen of the Kerosene

by Edwin Dial Torgerson



JEAN PAUL GUY MARIE DUPONT, le Duc du Beaumarchais, catapulted out of New York with a meek, young secretary and a memory of hectic happenings along the primrose path popularly known as Broadway.

He paused at Gulf Coast summer resorts long enough to determine that Southern belles were either too languid or too bored to be interested in French counts and dukes. There had been so many of them, a tactful hotel clerk had explained to the duke's

secretary, and some of them had turned out not to be real counts and dukes.

So Jean Paul Guy—in short, the duke—proceeded somewhat more leisurely West, in search of new pleasures, primarily, and business investments, secondarily.

In the prosperous young city of Dalton he found an up-to-date hotel begun in Louis Quatorze style and finished in Spanish Renaissance, where the cuisine was excellent, as alleged, and the bridal suite was sumptuous enough to please the taste of transient nobility. Forthwith he became a lion in society, and his secretary, too, as the youthful beaus of Dalton testified, proved a bear-cat.

Celeste Morgan, who spoke French with an Oklahoma accent, and had been in Paris long enough to learn that the Latin quarter was not a coin, led the society girls of Dalton in entertaining the duke; and was thoughtless and democratic enough, on occasion, to allow the secretary to think he was human.

"I have secured him in New York," explained the duke, *sotto voce*, at tea one day. "He has not proved particularly useful, as you may have apprehended, but he knows the language most skilfully, and he is—what do you express it—past master of the society?"

The secretary, who admitted, not without blushing, that his name was Flowers, knew the language so much more skilfully than the duke, that Celeste found it convenient to tell him for interpretation what she wanted the duke to know. Some things she told him did not reach the ears of the duke, who would have been displeased, no doubt, had he known that William Flowers and Miss Morgan motored so frequently together.

"I know a little French, you see," Celeste told the secretary, "but it is so awkward to converse when one cannot express the shades of thought one wishes to convey."

"The Shades of Thought," murmured Flowers. "How like a movie title you talk! Yes, indeed, Miss Morgan, it is most difficult, it is most difficult."

"The secretary, he is most fresh," bantered Celeste. "But he knows to talk the

English, which helps. Tell me, Mr. Flowers, why do you choose to be a satellite to foppish nobility, when you are so clever?"

"I was not aware," exhaled the secretary, along with his cigarette-smoke, "that I was clever. And, furthermore, Miss Morgan, I would not have the exquisite pleasure of your company were it not for my position as—er—social adviser to the Duc du Beaumarchais. Moreover, I resent being called a satellite, and I deny most assiduously that Jean Paul Guy Marie Dupont, *et cetera*, le Duc du Beaumarchais, is a fop."

"Well, you needn't tell him so, but I'm not wasting away my young soul pining for him," breezed Celeste. "And if you were not along—"

She shifted gears noisily in deference to a hill.

"I beg your pardon?"

"Nothing; you misunderstood me," she finished coolly. "Are you going to be at the dinner dance to-night?"

He was, and even the professionally unobserving eye of the duke absorbed the significance of his frequent dances with the heiress of the Morgan oil estates.

"Miss Morgan, she is most effectively pretty, do you not think?" observed the duke, carelessly, after the dance.

"Yes, and she raves about you," said Flowers, with enthusiasm. "Her only regret is that she did not remain in Paris long enough to master the language, so that she might converse with you more intelligently."

"It is most hard and tragic, *monsieur*," sighed the duke. "One does so wishes to soar the heights of the poetic fancy, and one must be content with: 'How do you do? Thank you. Is it not most ravishing weather?' *Sacrebleu!* Had we not better return to that Nouvelle—to that New Orleans, where the French it is more better spoken?"

"Dalton is a most promising city," demurred the secretary. "It is alive with interesting women, M. le Duc, and the social opportunities are quite as numerous as the chances for business investment."

"Ah, yes, the business," recollected the duke.

Three weeks flitted innocently by,

crowded with *thés dansants* and *dîners dansants* and *soupers dansants* and other innovations of French flavor.

The duke vied with his enterprising secretary in paying attentions to Celeste, the Queen of the Kerosene, as Beaumarchais privately and unpoetically dubbed her.

The duke proposed.

"It wasn't so sudden as I pretended it was," confided Celeste to the secretary next day. "You know, I couldn't begin to remember that blamed French word for 'sudden.' What is it, anyway, Mr. Flowers?"

"Search me," drawled William. "'Vite' is 'quick.' Why didn't you say, 'Ah, M. le Duc, this is so vite!'"

"I said: 'What do you take me for?'" pouted Miss Morgan, indignantly. "And the boob had the nerve to say, 'I take you for the wife, my charming little queen.' Why, that nut couldn't take me for a ride!"

"Do not offend him, I beg," implored the secretary. "He wants to go to that New Orleans, and I don't."

"Don't worry. I told him to wait a while, until I could recover from the first shock of happiness. I told him we didn't like to rush things out here—except in a business way—and that there was plenty of time."

"Which is manifestly true," said William, much relieved. "I should regret leaving so—so suddenly."

But the duke plainly was in no mood to tarry.

"It is not good—the climate!" he raved. "It is not—the people, they are most boorish. They do not have the value for things except money, money, money—and kerosene. The heart it is stifled in such a fume of atmosphere. I shall depart!"

"I fear M. le Duc is unadvisedly hasty," objected Flowers. "In New Orleans, it is the same—it is cotton and bananas, if not oil. Our America is not poetic on the surface, M. le Duc. It hides its romance in trade-marks and market quotations. I am sure you will find Dalton a most profitable place in which to tarry. Then there is Miss Morgan: she would not let you know it, but she finds you most fascinating."

"But there is the difficulty of finance," exclaimed the duke. "Do you not know

that I have awkwardness in cashing my checks, even? It renders me quite exasperated when at the banks they ask questions. And even my traveling—what do you say—travelers' checks—they are doubted most unhappily. I have here a paper for quite sufficient money, but I feel the bankers they will insult me."

He produced a check on New York exchange, which his secretary examined carelessly.

"It is perfectly good," Flowers declared. "Leave these little financial bothers to me, M. le Duc. I can adjust such details without your worrying about them."

Flowers looked for an indorser, and found Celeste Morgan.

"I may need your help with this check," he said nonchalantly. "I guess you know us well enough, eh? I wouldn't have the audacity, but it's such a bore to hunt around for an indorser."

"Sure," laughed the heiress. "Anything to help an honored guest of our city."

He produced the check and looked at it quizzically.

"Wait a minute," he said, when they entered the Third National Bank of Dalton.

He busied himself at a writing-desk, returning presently.

"You must have written a better one," suggested Miss Morgan.

"Not exactly, but the duke is careless," he smiled. "It's a check given him by Russell T. Montague, of New York—who is considerable of a millionaire, as you know, but whose checks aren't worth a sou without the duke's indorsement. I indorsed it for him."

"And now it's my turn. I see," agreed Celeste.

She noted carelessly that it was a check for thirty-five hundred dollars.

"You'd better deposit it in favor of the duke," she advised.

"But he doesn't want it deposited," explained Flowers, uncomfortably. "He insists on having the currency."

He packed the bills in his wallet and delivered them duly to the duke.

Miss Morgan thought more than once of the transaction.

She delighted in teasing the duke.

"I had the pleasure of indorsing one of your checks to-day, M. le Duc," she told him boldly at dinner.

The duke was stricken with astonishment.

"What! That pig of my *secrétaire*! You do not say that he has annoy you with my business affair? I shall make him discharge! I shall—what do you say—make him a can! Such I cannot tolerate. *Mon Dieu!* A check, which you have indorse!"

"Do not excite yourself, my dear M. le Duc," begged Celeste. "It is my fault. He wanted to hunt up an indorser, and I wouldn't let him. It's such a little thing—and we don't mind being friendly out here."

The duke was not to be calmed.

"It is a trifle amount—twenty-five hundred miserable dollars—but it is not the amount; it is the principle, as you say; it is—"

"The principal was thirty-five hundred dollars, M. le Duc," corrected Miss Morgan. "Is it possible there was some mistake?"

"Thirty-five! You do not joke with me, *mademoiselle*? Please do not be unkind and make me more excite!"

"We cashed a check for thirty-five hundred," returned Celeste, coolly.

"Then my secretary, he is a crook!"

She grew pale.

"Ah, no—perhaps—perhaps I am mistaken. Let us not be too hasty, *monsieur*. Let us talk first with Mr. Flowers."

"You have need of me, *monsieur*?" inquired the secretary who was conversing with a stranger on the veranda.

"It is the police of which I shall have need," shouted the duke. "That you are a thief I was not aware. You have tampered with my check—you have stolen! I shall have you in the jail!"

"Jail? Police?"

The secretary was smiling queerly.

"Shake hands with Mr. Arlington, of the New York detective force," he invited. "Perhaps he can serve you. This is M. Jean Paul Guy Marie Dupont, le Duc du Beaumarchais."

The duke wore a ghastly countenance. Miss Morgan, at his side, was painfully agitated.

The stranger did not release the hand of the duke.

"I understand you cashed a check to-day against the account of Russell T. Montague," said Arlington crisply. "May I ask who wrote it?"

The duke's fingers squirmed in the iron grip that held them.

"I have not cashed a check," he cried. "It is this false person—this Flowers—who has cashed a check, if one has been cashed."

"Is that right, Mr. Montague?" asked the detective, releasing the duke's hand.

The secretary laughed.

"Please don't call me names," he protested. "It may make the lady suspicious. I've been sailing under false colors here, Miss Morgan. I cashed a check, but it wasn't the duke's. I didn't like the signature, and I wrote a better one."

The duke was casting about despairingly for means of exit.

"No hurry, old man," the detective assured him, soothingly.

"The worst of it was he had written checks like it before," continued the secretary—"so many, in fact, that I was curious to know how he did it. That's why I enlisted as secretary—as satellite, Miss Morgan—to a doubtful type of nobility. Allow me to suggest, M. le Duc, that you might find the climate more agreeable in that New Orleans."

"You don't mean to let that crook go!" gasped the detective.

Beaumarchais slunk suddenly away.

Celeste Morgan's motor sang merrily over the hills.

"And your name really is Russell T. Montague—and you just played secretary to a fake duke for the fun of it—you're quite sure of that?"

"The check didn't come back, did it?" demanded her companion, a meek young man who talked through cigarette-smoke.

"No, but you might be a bogus millionaire, just as he was a bogus nobleman."

"Would you mind going to New York with me to—to verify things?"

She shifted gears again; but when they reached the top of the hill she murmured:

"I'll try anything—once."

A Salesman's by Line Cyrus James



IN the smoking compartment of a Pullman-car, four men were sitting, filling the air with large clouds of blue smoke from their cigars. A fifth was standing in the doorway, drinking from a paper cup. As he finished the water, he threw the cup toward the cuspidor and, missing it, took a step forward to crush the paper with his foot.

"I'm a salesman by profession," he said. "I've been in an insurance house for a spell. But outside of them two lines, I don't know nothin'. An' I ain't gonna say what I'd do or think in anything outside my line. That's my idea."

"Sure, I'm agreeing with you, but this case I speak of is a case any one could have an opinion on," said one of the men, continuing a theme which he had evidently introduced. "What I want to know is what you think this fellow ought to have done."

"It's just like I tell you: this fellow was a newspaper reporter, with a wife and family to support; he heard the star witness for the State say outside the court-room door, that if he caught that fellow, the defendant, down an alley, he'd knock the crutch out from under his arm and leave him lying there."

"Now, if that reporter took the stand and told that, with his working for a strong, conservative newspaper, he'd lose his job sure, and where would his wife and kids be? If he didn't take the stand, he knew that fellow wasn't getting a fair trial."

The salesman looked out of the window, lost, for a few seconds, in deep thought.

"Well, I know that's a point in rules about witnesses being crooked," he answered, turning from the window. "But I ain't gonna say. He had to decide whether he was gonna act fer what folks says is right or fer what he feels is righter, mebbe. The government tells him one thing, and his wife and kids tell him another."

"But I'll say this, that any one can't have an opinion on cases like them; there's some things as a man can't decide, and them cases is His cases."

The salesman looked at his watch. "An' listen, now I'll ask you a question. I jus' got time. An' mebbe you can tell me what a lawyer an' a preacher an' me didn't know the answer to."

He paused for a moment, and blew his nose violently.

"It takes a bit of explainin', but if you'll jus' set still, I'll shoot it to you fast." He stuffed the handkerchief away.

It was like this. I was in the insurance business in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, the town we passed back the way. It ain't as live a town as you might think, Harrisburg, bein' on the main line, an' a railroad center at that. But my house sent me out on a trip to—well, I leave out the name of the town. But it was down in the country of the—shucks, how am I gonna tell this story? I don't want to hurt no one's feelin's.

Well, the town was down in a country where is the meanest, orneriest brand of people I ever see listed under the headin'

of religion, and Christian religion at that. Queer folks is right. The men wear long, black coats and black hats, black ties, black everything. They've got mean faces, most of them. An' the women have got mean faces, too, or else they looked all played out an' carryin' a load of misery round with 'em.

Well, I was sent down to investigate a case of a barn burnin' down which had been insured jus' two months before. The boss said right away that somethin' looked funny about it. Well, when I got into the town, I hired me a buggy and drove out to the farm where these people lived, about four miles from the town. I hitches the horse to a post and walks up to the door and knocks. No answer. I waits a couple of minutes and knocks again, real loud, and waits.

Presently I begun to hear voices 'whisperin' and feet shufflin' behind the door. Then I notices some one peekin' at me from behind a window-curtain. I don't appear to notice nothin', though, 'cause I wasn't gonna let on I thought somethin' was up about that barn burnin' down so soon after insurance was taken out. But some one was peekin' at me, an' I knew there was suspicion around.

Next minute the door opened, an' a tall, lank fellow with a stoop, and a face like a hawk, lets me in. An' no more than I had stepped over the sill when an old lady comes rushin' out of the dining-room and snaps at me:

"Whatta you want?"

But the lad gives her a look an' says to me, kind of short like:

"Come in here an' take a chair, will you." He goes into the parlor and the old lady follows us in. I placed her as, his mother right off, an' I was right.

Then I sets down an' explains what I come fer, and when I gets through, I says:

"So what I want is fer you to tell me jus' how you think it happened." Very nice and easy, you know, so as not to scare them into sayin' nothin'. Country folks shut up like clams most times when city-strangers come around.

Well, at that, the old lady begins to scream and carry on.

"I tell you it was an accident, an accident! That's what it was," she yells at me. Her voice was sort of cracked like and shrill. I doped her out right then as a little bit funny. But before I could answer, the lad gives her another quick look and then says to me:

"Yes, it was an accident. We don't know how it happened."

"Well," says I, appearin' to notice nothin', neither the old lady nor the lad, "if you could give me a suggestion. There might hev been some old greasy rags down there in the barn, or some kerosene, an' somebody might hev dropped some hot ashes by it, or mebbe somebody might hev had a grudge against you. You see, I gotta make a report."

All this time the lad is keepin' his eye right on his mother. When I finished speakin', he says without turnin' toward me:

"We don't know how it happened. There might hev been some rags or kerosene there. I don't know. None of the folks around us has got a grudge against us that I know of."

Well, I could see then that I 'wasn't gonna get anythin' more out of him: that's the way of country folks; they get a tale and they stick to it. So I takes out a pad an' begins makin' notes, so as to stall a bit, an' see if mebbe somethin' wouldn't turn up. I kept on writing 'most five minutes. Presently the old lady gets impatient.

"What's he writin', Jem?" she asks.

"Nothin', ma. He's writin' what I told him," says he, kind of sore.

Well, then I thinks of seein' the old man. If I could see him without the lad an' the old woman bein' around, I thought mebbe the story he'd give me mightn't fit just the same way.

"Is the mister in?" I asks, and the words are just out of my mouth when the old lady begins to gurgle in her throat again, but the lad gives her the steady eye fer a minute and then says to me:

"No. He ain't in. He's gone away, an' he won't be back fer a week. Mebbe not then." And he turns to his mother: "Ma, you go up-stairs."

Well, after that, I tole them I'd be back

in about a week. Then I goes out, gets in my buggy, and drives away. But while I was drivin' back to the town, I begun thinkin' that it's mighty funny when a farmer don't know what he's got in his barn, an' it's mighty funny when a farmer goes away right in the middle of harvestin', fer I noticed that the wheat was jus' waitin' fer to be cut. I was raised on a farm till I was a kid of twelve.

Back in town, I begun to look around to see what I could stir up. I wanted to learn more'n we had on our records at the house about them people. Reliable people ain't always *just* that, I've found out bumping around the U. S. A. But I didn't want to ask none of them natives that lived around them parts about the folks at the farm, 'cause I figured if there was anythin' to cover up, they wouldn't loose it.

I stood around the main corner fer a while, and, presently, along comes a fellow down the street who wears a decent man's clothes and looks like he might hev been born a hundred miles west of Broadway.

I follows him, an' presently he goes into a building with a lawyer's panel hangin' out of the door. I goes in, see he's the lawyer, palavers with him some about the weather, see he's the man I want, and engages him.

Then I lays the whole thing before him, my suspicions an' all, and asks him right out what he knows about the family.

Well, he tole me that people figured the old man was worth about a hundred thousand dollars! Whatta you know about that? But he says that he's closer than a miser, mean as the devil. He says he's so mean he won't keep a dog around the place 'cause the dog 'd eat too much. I've knowed folks like that.

An' the lawyer tells me that there was some mighty mean talk goin' around about the old man beatin' his little girl to death, beatin' her acrosst the back with a stick and injurin' her spine. Anyways, the girl took sick an' died all in four days, about a week an' a half before I come on the scene.

The night of the fire, the lawyer fellow said he was there, an' the old man wasn't around the place at all. Folks said he was on a trip some place, but the lawyer fellow

said he remembers bein' down at the depot himself the day of the fire, an' the old man didn't leave then, 'cause he was there both trains. Both trains—funny, ain't it? He agreed with me about the farmer goin' away while the harvest is on, 'specially with hired help bein' mighty scarce.

Well, after that, I didn't see no point of me stayin' in a bum town any longer'n I needed to, so I thanks the lawyer, gives him my card an' firm, tells him to keep an eye out fer anythin' new, an' goes out. I decided to wait till the old man showed up, an' I went back to Harrisburg.

In about a week—no, nine or ten days, I went back to the town, thinkin' I had given him enough time to show up. I goes direct to my lawyer and finds him in. I asks him what's new.

"Well," says he, "he ain't showed up yet. Nobody knows when he left town or where he went. The only thing that might prove somethin' is this: them folks is actin' mighty queer up at that farm, an' folks is beginnin' to talk about their doin's.

"The night after I left," says he, "a young kid comes into the town an' says that he seen somebody walking down below that barn carryin' a lantern an' goin' mighty slow toward the woods. He was scared, an' run into town as fast as he could. An' two days before I come back," he said, "a farmer was tellin' down at the depot that he passed that farm, drivin' in, an' the old lady was out working in the fields an' had a gun standin' by her handy like, leanin' up against a tree.

"The farmer pulled up his team and calls out cheerful: 'Mornin'.' But the old lady pretends she don't hear him. Then he says: 'When's the mister comin' back?' She don't answer. Then he spies the gun leanin' against the tree, an' he says, laughin': 'What you got that gun fer.' You a-feared of field rats?"

"At that she straightens up an' says: 'He ain't come back yet, and he ain't comin' back. That gun's loaded, an' I ain't a-feared of nothin' never.' The farmer give a whistle an' drove on in town.

"That's all I know," the lawyer winds up.

Well, what he knew was enough fer me jus' then. It made me sure as death that there was somethin' funny about the whole deal, though I didn't begin to suspect jus' how funny it was. I leaves the lawyer and walks up the street, doin' a powerful lot of thinkin', an' gets a bottle of cherry pop.

What? Yes, that's right—cherry pop. You can't get no hard liquor round them parts. Them folks is Christian that way—they keep it hid.

Well, as I was sayin', I was doin' a powerful lot of thinkin' an' tryin' to decide on the next hitch. Fer I wasn't gonna give the thing up when I was blame sure somethin' was wrong. That ain't no way to treat a company if you want to get them to raise your pay.

An' finally I decides I'll go out to that farm again, an' just look over the ground; sort of mosey around the place myself, an' mebbe I could get the old lady off by herself an' scare her, jus' a bit, you know, to sort of loosen up her tongue, 'cause I had an idea she knew more'n she was sayin'. I remembered, too, that the lawyer said there wasn't no dog out there, so I knew I wouldn't get into no trouble.

I couldn't get no buggy any place, but I was set on gettin' back home the next mornin' 'cause I had a pretty big deal listed fer the next day, an' wanted to land it. So I decides to walk out. I guess it must hev been more'n four miles out to that farm, 'cause it took me an hour an' twenty-some minutes to get there. The sun was gone down, an' it was gettin' pretty near dark.

Well, when I got there I started moseyin' around the barn, lookin' fer signs of kerosene cans or anythin' that might turn up, an' was thinkin' of goin' up to the house an' lookin' in a window, mebbe, when jus' then the kitchen door opens an' somebody comes out carryin' a lantern.

By gee, says I, there's that lantern, an' I drops flat on the ground right in among them burnt timbers. Then I peeks my head up to see what was goin' on.

The lantern was comin' toward me, an' I could see a pair of man's legs. The lantern kept right on comin', and so I had to duck my head, an' the next thing, I hears feet

scrapin' over the ashes an' burnt rafters. I lay there like a mouse, an' believe me, with it bein' dark as pitch, an' them queer people prowlin' around that old burnt-down barn, I was shiverin' a little bit, too.

Just then my foot got tangled up in some wire behind me, an' I made a little noise, an' the old lady, who must hev been followin', though I didn't see her, calls out in a cracked whisper:

"Jem, what's that?"

I'd hev knowed that voice any place.

"Nothin', ma. You're a fool," answers the lad, but though he was speakin' in almos' his natural voice, I could tell he was speakin' big, an' was almos' scared as much as his ma.

That give me a little more nerve, an' I shifted my head so as I could peek through a crack an' watch him. He was lookin' round and round a certain spot, down on his hands and knees, an' studyin' the groun' very close like. I wonders what he was doin'.

"Jem?" the old lady puts in again, sort of hoarse.

"Ma, you shut up. I ain't gonna hev you makin' me fidgety. The only thing you've done right since the fire was thinkin' of his watch." The lad wasn't so scared now.

Then everything was quiet fer about two minutes. I tell you them minutes seemed long. Then the old lady whispers again in a sort of whinin' way:

"Did you get it, Jem?"

"Ma, you either shut up or go back to the house. You made this whole mess, wantin' that insurance." He was gettin' sore.

Then he kept on pokin' around in them ashes with a stick for about four or five minutes an' I could hear him mumblin' to himself. Finally he straightened up; I ducked; but I could hear him kick some of them ashes up against the timbers an' heard him spit on the ground.

"I can't find it," he says, sort of sore and disgusted. "But if I can't find it, I knows there's nobody else as can find it." Then he spits on the ground again an' says: "An' that's the last of that murderin' fool—he ain't gonna murder nobody again."

Then he laughs some to himself an' takes the lantern an' goes up to the house.

I waits a minute to make sure the old lady's gone, too, an' then I gets up an' beats it for time over to the road.

Now, do you see what I was up against? Do you see what I had to have an opinion on?

Well, goin' back to the town that night, I thinks it all out until I couldn't do any more thinkin', an' what I figured out was like this: that old man had murdered his little girl, leastwise, the lad an' that old lady figured out, sure as death, an' they was layin' a charge of wilful murder up against him, an' they must hev hated him some; an' bein' scared to death of him, like most of them folks are about the man around the house, they was afeered to make a charge against him open, les' he'd do somethin' to them 'fore they could prove it, if they *could* prove it.

So they jus' took the law into their own hands; that lad was the one who done it, 'cause he was sharp, an' he wasn't scared of nothin' after the old man done that, I figured; an' them two, the lad an' the old woman, got that old man down in the barn an' burned him up so as to leave nothin' left of him. I tell you, decent folks don't know how them folks can hate down in them Christian communities.

An' the lad was right: where they made their mistake was tryin' to get the insurance money, 'cause the insurance business isn't gonna give away money any easier'n any other business, an' if there's anything funny about a case, they is gonna find it out if it can be found out.

Yes, sir, that was the mistake they made. They might hev made up some sort of a story about the old man bein' drowned in a pond, or most anythin' that 'd take.

An' that was what put me in a fix, 'cause I figured it out like this: if I didn't tell nobody about it, they was gonna get that insurance money sure, 'cause there wasn't nothin' more to say but it was a accidental fire, an' that money belonged to the company, an' it wasn't mine; if I did tell them two, the lad an' his ma, was goin' up for murder.

Now I knows that there's places where a man can take the law into his own hands an' afterwards get away with it an' hev people say as he was right; but that wasn't one of them places, 'cause them people stick to the letters of the law like a leech, an' there ain't no gettin' around it, right or wrong.

Well, by the time I arrives in the town I was in a stew; I didn't know what to think. An' finally I jus admits to myself that I don't know what to do. When a man does that he's a long ways toward bein' right. An' I gets to thinkin' that mebbe I could get some dope on it better by askin' somebody else.

I ain't one fer rushin' around askin' what different folks think when I'm stumped, but in that case I knew I'd got to do somethin', an' I couldn't do it jus' alone. I thinks then of the lawyer, an' I knew he was a man I could trust, 'cause I'd got fairly well acquainted with him, an' I sized him up fer a good one even if he was a country lawyer. There ain't nothin' against a man stayin' in the country if he wants to.

Well, I went to the lawyer, an' after gettin' him 'proper prepared an' acquainted with the whole story, jus' what I heard an' saw, then I tells him of the fix as it looked to me. He kept noddin' his head while I was talkin', an' I knew as he understood, an' I'd picked the right man. When I gets through, he sits thinkin' hard fer a long time, an' then he says:

"Mr. Jenkins, in these here times, instead of it bein' an' eye fer an eye, an' a tooth fer a tooth, it's dollars fer a tooth an' the pen fer an eye. You're right. If you don't tell, then they'll get that money an', as you say, it ain't yours. An' if yo do tell, then them two is gonna take the penalty. I know that lad, an' he's mean, but he ain't half as mean as his old man, an' that's hope. There's some lawyers that might get them off light, but I couldn't do it. Mr. Jenkins, I don't know what to say."

Well, me an' him beat around fer a long time, an' always come out the same place. Finally, he says that the only thing he could suggest was goin' over an' seein' a certain parson who lived in the town, not one of them native parsons, he says, but a

live man who'd talk sensible an' could be trusted.

We went over to the parson's, an' he was still up writin' on a pile of papers as big as a house. The minute I laid eyes on him I sized him up fer a man. A great big fellow, he was, with a frame like an' ox, an' a lot of gray hair. He was sittin' there in a blue-flannel shirt, an' when we come in' without knockin', he got up, still scribblin' on the paper, so big that he looked like he could handle a bull an' give it some.

"Come in, Bill," says he when he sees the lawyer. "Glad to meet you, Mr. Jenkins," an' gives me a good hand-shake.

"I keep pretty late hours," says he to me. "But we hev to down here, 'cause we hev a big job to handle, don't we, Bill? Sit down, gentlemen. I'm through."

Well, 'fore I got through I saw he did hev a big job—'cause he made it big.

Then I sailed in an' tole him the whole story like I tole it to the lawyer. An' the lawyer puts in his word. An' while we was talkin', the preacher keeps walkin' up an' down, noddin' his head, an' snappin' out questions when he didn't get us quite.

Well, when we had the whole thing laid out nice before him, he turns an' faces me.

"I've been down in this country eighteen years," says he, "an' I know these people well. I know they're a mighty long ways from seein' God. Money comes first of anythin' in their life, like it comes first in the life of most all folks, 'cause it's an instinct. But down here," says he, "money gets to be mighty like a craze, an' the men hev got hearts of stone on that account, an' they bring their children up to hev hearts of stone. They try to hide all that under a cryin' religion. That's why I'm here, to fight money."

He stops fer a minute an' looks at the floor. Then he goes on.

"Mr. Jenkins," says he, "if I had the money, I'd give it to pay that insurance, an' I know if you had it, you'd do the same, an' so would Bill. I don't know what to say. But I know life this much, that there is some cases a man can't know, an' them is His cases, up there."

The train began to slow down. The salesman looked out of the window, pulled out his watch, and stood up to reach for his hat and coat.

One of the men sitting on the couch could no longer restrain his curiosity.

"What did you eventually do?" he asked.

In the salesman's face and manner was most evident disgust at the idle curiosity displayed in the question.

"Friend," he answered, "I ain't sayin' what I would hev done. It's jus' like I was tellin' you. I was back in Harrisburg three or four days, an', believe me, I was doin' a powerful lot of thinkin'. I was new in the business, then, an' I didn't know my boss well, an' didn't want to tell him les' he might jump to save his dollars. An' I didn't want to cheat, 'cause I find it don't pay. Things even up in this old world.

"But after four days, I gets a telegram from that lawyer fellow, sayin' that the old lady had gone plumb crazy an' blabbed the whole thing. They tried to take the lad, but he barricaded himself, an' 'fore they got him, he blew his head off with a shot-gun. You see, that was one of His cases."

The salesman disappeared through the doorway as the train stopped. The curtain swung back into place.

Get going right

"GREEN SPIDERS"

BY ALFRED D. PETTIBONE

Begins NEXT WEEK

Pa's Appendix

by



Louise Platt Hauck

SIDE by side they sat in the gathering twilight, looking steadily ahead where the walk stretched down to the front gate. Cynthia Karnes, bride of a month, wondered at their unwonted silence as she came through the house and out upon the porch.

"Why, grandma, grandpa, what is the matter? I thought at first there was no one here, you were so quiet."

Pa removed his right knee from his left, stretched both legs, and crossed his left knee upon his right. There was an air of weighty deliberation about his movements which prepared Cynthia for important disclosures. But her grandfather merely resumed his unwinking attention upon the front walk.

"Doc out making calls?" Mrs. Cameron inquired. She had waited politely for pa to speak, and now threw herself into the silence as one who saves the day.

"Yes, Geoffry is nearly driven to death these days. It does seem as though the mothers in this town would learn after a while what not to feed their children." The physician's wife spoke with wearied authority. "Bananas and sausages and hot rolls for a child of two — yes, grandma, that's what that Lisle woman fed her little Herbert last night, and Geoffry's had a pretty piece of work to pull him through."

"I'll back doc to do it, though." Pa shot the remark impersonally, then relapsed

into his strange silence. Cynthia began to feel genuinely disturbed. Ordinarily her grandfather would have backed his assertion with chuckling tales of the young doctor's skill, winding up with the invariable dictum: "Doc's all right."

She turned to Mrs. Cameron, her lips opened for an impulsive question, but raised a warning hand.

"Pa," she said persuasively, "now Cynthia's here to keep me company, how'd you like to step over to Mr. Ransome's? You've been aimin' to go all day."

Pa rose offendedly. "Of course if ye want to get rid of me you have only to say so." He pulled his broad-brimmed hat from under his chair, clapped it on his white head, and strode down the walk. His wife looked after him with an odd blending of compassion and exasperation in her eyes.

"I declare for it, there's no such a thing as a full-grown man," she exclaimed. "Cynthia, don't you ever be surprised when doc comes out with behavior that'd shame a twelve-year-old boy. They don't never outgrow it, none of them," she finished impressively.

"What's the matter with him?" Cynthia asked.

Her grandmother drew a long breath and settled herself more comfortably in her chair.

"I'm going to tell you about it, for I

want you should speak to doc. It's like this: for the last three years, now, Cousin Ada's been trying to get me to visit her in Central City, and I've always laid out to go. She's got a fine, big house, with all the fancy plumbing and clothes chutes and stationary tubs heart could wish, and it 'd be a real treat to visit her.

"Well, the first year I proposed it to pa he come down with a spell of rheumatism, and I had to give it up. But I made sure I'd go the next fall. Come time to pack my trunk, what should your grandfather do but slip on a piece of green cane and wrench his knee. It really was twisted, and swelled pretty bad," she added, quite as though Cynthia had expressed a doubt upon the subject.

"Last fall I served notice on him in September that he was to take extra care of his rheumatism, and not go to cuttin' any more slippin' capers or such like. He expressed hisself as ready and willing for me to go, and I got that new plum serge all made for my trip. Well, it's hanging in my clothes press right now as good as new.

"Pa was attacked with a dreadful pain in his right side. How that man did groan and twist and carry on! Declared he had acute indigestion or ptomain poisoning, and though I had my strong suspicions, I couldn't get my own consent to go and leave him sufferin'. So I gave it up. This year—" Ma paused, and the significance in her manner riveted Cynthia's attention.

"This year," she breathed.

"This year your poor grandfather's got appendicitis, and nobody can tell from one day to another when he's got to be operated on."

Cynthia bubbled with laughter.

"The old fraud! Has Geoffry seen him?"

"Yes, he has," ma told her unexpectedly. "And he says there really is a soreness there. I ain't doubtin' his word, nor pa's either, for that matter, but I calculate I can diagnose that soreness better than doc, if he is an M.D. When a man gettin' pretty close to seventy wants buckwheat cakes and fried pork for breakfast from October to May, eats a hunk of cheese and a piece of mince-pie 'most every night be-

fore he goes to bed, and *smokes* the sinful amount that Henry Cameron does, you can't in reason expect anything but a soreness. Time was when I prided him in the amount of rich food he could tuck away. But now the milk-toast and oatmeal-porridge hour has struck for us both, but I can't make pa see it."

"But why doesn't grandpa want you to go?" Cynthia harked back to the perplexing subject. "He's stayed here many a time with Jenny to look after him. There was that year you visited me in school—and when you went out to Seattle to see Uncle John—why doesn't he want you to go to Cousin Ada's?"

Ma looked furtively from left to right before she answered, her voice lowered beyond the possibility of being overheard.

"I'll tell you why. It's because Prentiss White's living right next door to Ada, and he lost his wife six years ago besides."

Her granddaughter attempted vainly to evolve sequence from these remarks. Abandoning it, she inquired:

"Who is Prentiss White?"

"He's an old beau of mine. I was engaged to him when I first met your grandpa," ma answered, a touch of complacency in her tones. "And pa has never forgot the fact nor ever will."

"Grandpa jealous?" Cynthia gave a little shriek of laughter. "Why, that was thirty—no, forty years and more ago, wasn't it? Why, I supposed people outgrew such feelings long before they reached grandpa's age!"

"People don't outgrow their hearts, ever," ma said sagely. "And pa's is as fiery and loving now where it concerns me as it was then."

She straightened a bit, smoothing back the hair from her forehead with a touch of coquetry. Then her face resumed its resolute expression.

"Now, Cynthia, I've made up my mind I'll have to give your grandpa a lesson. He's been humored long enough. And I want you to get doc to help me."

"How?" Cynthia asked.

"Sit closer and I'll tell you."

For many minutes the two heads, gray and brown, bent together, Cynthia's atten-

tive silence broken now and then by giggles of appreciation. They started guiltily apart when the click of the gate announced pa's return.

"What ye doing, ma?" Mr. Cameron inquired a day or two later, coming upon his wife with her head buried deep in a clothes press.

"Looking over my clothes before I start to pack for Ada's," she answered promptly.

"That so? Don't stint yourself for anything ye need." There was only kindly interest in pa's manner, and he passed from the room without further remarks. An hour later his wife found him on his bed groaning dismally. In spite of her instant irritation, ma could but admire the artistic finish and convincing reality of the performance. Nothing dramatic—pa was not the man to overdo it—but patient, suffering sounds calculated to wring the heart of the woman who loved him.

"Side bad again, pa?" she inquired impersonally. Pa opened weary eyes.

"Yes, ma, it's pretty bad."

"I notice there's a quarter gone out of one of the fresh rhubarb pies. Have you been in the pantry since noon?"

"I ate pretty light at dinner," pa said plaintively. "I don't suppose you grudge me my food, ma? It's that derved old appendix of mine again. There's no two ways about it, the pesky thing 'll have to come out."

"Yes, that's what doc thinks, too," his wife told him composedly.

Pa sat up with a jerk.

"Why—what—have ye been talking to doc about it?"

"Me and Cynthia both," ma nodded. "Of course he can't say right offhand just how it 'll turn out, but from what he's seen of the case he thinks it's pretty serious. He's got me so scared I've about decided to send for Dr. Wilmet from the city."

"Now, Henry, don't you say a word!" She waved him down with an imperious hand. "What does the cost—what does my visit to Ada—what does anything amount to compared with your health? That appendix has got to come out at all costs—this very week, if it's possible. I see where I've been a neglectful wife to ye,

Henry—I'm ashamed to say that I even doubted the genuineness of that pain.

"But I'm convinced now, and I'm going to make it up to you. I've spoke to doc about making arrangements for the operation—he thinks he can do it here as well as not. And I'm learning down at the Red Cross rooms how to dress the wound and to turn you over in bed without hurting you any more than can be avoided."

The stricken man upon the bed stared at her wildly as he felt the jaws of the trap tighten about him.

"Don't ye go so fast, ma," he pleaded. "You've always contended it was indigestion, and maybe you're right. Maybe if I—"

"It's gone too far for that now," his wife said briskly. "When an appendix's diseased it's got to come out, that's all there is to it. And I ain't going to leave this thing in Geoffry's hands too much. He's a good doctor, but he's young, and the very fact of his being our grandson-in-law might make him too tender of you for your own good."

"They tell me that Dr. Wilmet can find a bad appendix in anybody; just lay down and give a couple of groans like those you was fetching a few minutes ago and he can tell right away it's all due to your appendix. They say he cuts 'em out by the dozen, and that his collection of appendixes in glass jars is the largest and finest in the State."

She beamed encouragingly at him through her spectacles, and pa's miserable gaze sought the floor.

In spite of his cautiously rapid recovery from his attack the preparations for the impending operation went forward with a dreadful briskness. The spare bedroom was denuded of rugs and hangings and scrubbed to a hospital-like cleanliness. The odor of disinfectants smote pa's nostrils and made him strangely apathetic at meal time.

He watched the perfecting of these arrangements with all the joyous anticipation of a condemned man beholding the erection of his own scaffold. He argued long and earnestly with his obdurate wife; he appealed piteously to Cynthia; he tried to

waylay the suddenly overbusy doctor and enlist his cooperation, but he made no headway whatever against the stream of solicitude for his well-being.

Ma expressed surprise at his lack of enthusiasm. She'd think a man that had suffered what he had suffered would be glad to get the thing out and over with. It was natural that he should be a little nervous, she granted. Of course there was always danger in any operation to a man of his age; and of course there was the shock to his system to be considered—and the undoubted pain he would suffer while the wound was healing. But, as she pointed out to him, without the operation there could be but one outcome, whereas with it he had at least a fighting chance. She seemed astonished that he found so little comfort in this argument.

There came a day when Dr. Karnes, satchel in hand, was ceremoniously admitted to the darkened room where pa lay. A strong odor of camphor hung on the air, and the old man's face was pale with apprehension.

"Why, grandad," the young doctor exclaimed, gripped for a minute by the reality of the stage setting, "are you this bad off? Why didn't you send for me?"

"Bad off? I ain't a bit worse off than I was this time last year, or the year before that, for the matter of that, the year you shed your knickerbockers for your first long pants. There ain't a thing in the world the matter with me—not a thing!"

"Then what—why—"

"It's ma," pa answered resignedly. "She's going to have me cut on whether or no. And the worst of it is I can't tell whether she really believes in my appendix, or whether she's getting back at me for keeping her from her visit to Ada's. You see—" Pa swallowed once or twice, then went manfully on with his tale:

"She's been wantin' to go to visit her cousin for quite a while, and I ain't never really favored the idea. There used to be an up-and-comin' young chap that your grandmother-in-law was engaged to when I first met her. I never did rightly understand just why she throwed him over for me. But I've never been able to get en-

tirely over the idea that maybe sometimes she's wished she hadn't done it. And now he's a widower and living right next door to Ada—and Ada ain't a woman I'd put a little deviltry like that past—you see how it is, don't you?"

Dr. Karnes's broad shoulders were shaking as he walked to the window and looked out.

"I'm afraid she's got you, grandad," he said at last. "You understand, if I refuse to operate she'll send for Dr. Wilmet right off the bat." He averted his eyes from pa's pathetic face. Only the stern injunctions of his young wife kept him from betraying the conspiracy.

"Why, doc—Geoffry lad, do you mean to say you ain't a goin' to stand by me? Do you mean you're going to cut on me—fie that's always been your friend?" His voice rose quaveringly. "I've been counting on you to help me out. You said yourself it was too much heavy food—and smoking," he added unwillingly.

Geoffry's heart smote him afresh. He sat down on the bedside and took the old man's hand in his.

"Now, grandad, see here. What can I do about it? I told you they'll send for another man if I throw up the case. It's a darned shame," he went on. "I declare—I—I—" he trailed into silence, Cynthia's last words ringing in his ears. He rose abruptly. "I must be getting on. I've got two compound fractures out on the Sparta Road. Mrs. Temple's looking after them for me. Do you remember her? I believe she used to be Sue Winters." He strove with idle conversation to divert pa's mind from his own troubles. "I'll look in again this evening. Maybe you'll be better then."

"I don't know if ma'll let me," his patient declared sadly. "So-long, boy; I suppose ye can't help it, but I feel it kind of hard that you should turn against me at this time of my life."

All day young Dr. Karnes carried the memory of that dejected figure, and when he came upon his wife's grandmother that evening busy with the last stitches upon a hospital jacket, his indignation broke into speech.

"See, Geoffry, ain't that professional looking? I got the pattern through the kindness of the Red Cross ladies, and I've made pa two."

"How much farther are you going to let this thing run? I promised Cynthia I wouldn't give you away, but I'm getting pretty sore over the whole thing. Do you know grandad is suffering—yes, really and actually suffering with nervousness and alarm?"

Ma folded her work and put her thimble and thread in the black silk bag which hung from her chair back.

"Now, doc, I know Henry Cameron a whole lot better than you can ever expect to," she reminded him mildly. "You let things alone now and everything 'll come out all right."

Dr. Karnes took his way silently to the bedroom of the invalid, inwardly resolved to take matters into his own hands before another night came round. He found his patient in a strangely altered mood from that of the morning. Pa sat up and beckoned to him eagerly.

"Doc, come here! I want to ask you something. I recognize your position—Cynthia's husband and all—and I've been thinking it's mighty likely they've roped you in this, too. But if you could help me without going against any instructions you may have received from the distaff side of the house—could you see your way clear to do it?"

"Surest thing you know," his physician said slangily.

In the sitting-room down-stairs ma was saying with complacent prophecy:

"At the rate your grandfather's going now, Cynthia, I give him just twenty-four hours more to weaken and admit he's a fake. Then I'll strike while the iron's hot. I've got my trunk all packed, and I calculate to take the 11.23 for the city next Thursday."

It was somewhere near two o'clock when ma was awakened by heavy groans issuing from the pillow beside her. Somewhere in her dreams she had received the impression of the tinkling of a small alarm-clock

smothered at the beginning of its summons. She sat up and shook pa quite apprehensively.

"What is it, pa? What's hurting you?"

Her husband rolled his head in speechless misery, and only the spasmodic clutching at his side betrayed the source of his sufferings.

"Is it your side again? What did you eat for supper?" She reviewed the late repast, and finding there nothing of which she disapproved, became genuinely alarmed for her husband. "Shall I call doc, Henry?"

In answer to his anguished nod she sped to the telephone. Even as she went, try as she would, she could not entirely divest herself of the suspicions rooted so deeply in her mind.

Did the groans in her absence diminish in volume and intensity more than the distance warranted? The light of the bedside candle revealed no unusual pallor on pa's sunburnt features. Ma closed her lips tightly as she pulled a dress skirt over her nightgown and thrust her bare feet into her slippers.

To her indignation she was excluded from the examination which followed Dr. Karnes's entrance. The professional gravity of his manner awed her a little in spite of the fact (of which she reminded herself fiercely) that she had spread more pieces of bread and jam for this young whipper-snapper than he had pellets in his black case.

"He's pretty bad off, I'm afraid," Dr. Geoffry said when he came into the hall as the first rays of the rising sun struck across the east. "I've left him some pills to quiet the pain and I'll be back in an hour or so. He'll have to have a nurse. It's nothing serious, but he'll need careful care. I know just the woman, and I'll have her here as soon as possible."

He was off with his usual briskness, leaving ma to seek her husband without obtaining further satisfaction. Pa looked up with a wan smile of welcome. Her eyes interrogated him sharply.

"Well, ma, you'll be relieved to know that I ain't going to have that operation. Doc's found out the trouble. You were

right—it's what I've been eating. All I need to do now is to watch my diet and I'll soon be all right. I've decided to make it a practise to have nothing but milk toast for supper."

Still she said nothing. Pa plunged on. "And I reckon I'll have to give up most kinds of pie—and—maybe so many buckwheat cakes for breakfast—"

There was no softening of the eyes behind the spectacles, no diminishing of the suspicion on the set mouth. Pa sighed. It was almost more than the game was worth, but pa was a good sport. He made the supreme sacrifice.

"I've about made up my mind to quit smokin'—for a while, anyway. Doc seems to think it has something to do with that pesky pain." Would the implacable woman be satisfied now?

Ma's gaze wavered and fell. Her reason told her that pa's illness was genuine, but intuition, that whispering spirit that outlives logic itself, cautioned her to go slowly.

"Well, pa, I'm glad you're getting so reasonable in your old age," she admitted. "I'll write Cousin Ada I can't come, and we'll see what proper diet and good nursing will do for you."

Pa looked down at the bedspread. There was a trace of embarrassment in his manner.

"There's no reason you should give up your visit to Ada," he said. "Doc said I ain't in any danger, and you can go and have a good time. I feel kind of mean at keeping you here all these times you planned to go, and I'm going to see to it that you go now."

Ma smiled tolerantly.

"I'd look nice traipsing off to the city with you sick in bed, wouldn't I? Jenny's a good enough girl, but she's no sort of nurse."

"But Jenny won't have the nursing of me," pa said softly. "Doc's engaged another. You remember Sue Winters—Sue Templeton she is now? My, my, it seems only yesterday I was taking her to singing-school and pulling her curls! She had dimples deep enough to stick your finger in—as well I know."

He chuckled delightedly, caught himself up and turned it into a faint groan. "Doc says the dimples are gone, but the curls are still there, even if they're white instead of yellow."

He seemed totally unaware of the stiffening of ma's form as she bent forward in her chair.

"And are you countin' on—do you think for an instant that I'm going to turn ye over to Sue Winters—I should think I do remember that bold-faced flirt—while I go gallivantin' off to Ada's?" She hesitated, struggling with her pride. Pa passed a gnarled hand patiently across his forehead. Suddenly she dropped to her knees by the bed.

"Henry, Henry, can you ever forgive me? I suspicioned ye, Henry; suspicioned ye of plottin' to keep me home. I thought you didn't want me near Prentiss White, and I faulted ye for it, pa. I was going to give you a lesson. And here all the time you was really sufferin'. Can you forgive me, pa?"

"There, now, ma, don't feel so bad." The moisture in pa's eyes belied the upward quirk to pa's lips. His voice vibrated between remorse and triumph. "Of course I knew you were doing me an injustice—and of course I felt bad that it had to be so. But we'll say no more about it. If you don't want Sue to nurse me, you better call doc before he gets away from the house. And"—he sighed—"after a while I'd like you to make me a little oatmeal for my breakfast."

Ma recognized the generosity of the conqueror and bowed before it. On her way to the telephone she paused.

"I'll nurse ye good, Henry, and when you're well, we'll go to Ada's together. I'd like to show Prentiss White that I didn't throw him over all those years ago for nothing."

The quiet of the autumn morning fell upon the sick-room. Pa's face wore an expression of suffering—patiently, nobly borne. Perhaps it was his aching side; perhaps it was his conscience; perhaps it was a vista of weary days to come, untended by mince pie, buckwheat cakes—or smoking.



The Log-Book

By the Editor

THIS department was inaugurated in *THE ARGOSY* for February, 1911, and, as I explained at the time, was thus named because the log of a vessel is the record of happenings on the voyage, adding that *THE ARGOSY* owed its title to the famous treasure-ship of mythology in which Jason carried the golden fleece. In the same issue I suggested correspondence from my readers in these words: "I am wondering whether it is inviting an avalanche to suggest that my readers send in comments on the kind of stories they prefer—serial or short, love or mystery, comedy or adventure."

Well, I certainly got an avalanche, as you readers must realize for yourselves when you note that letters written in December, say, have to wait their turn until March before seeing the light of print. I got something else, too, as time went on—the conviction that in springing this department of intercourse between editor and readers we had struck a new note in modern magazine making. If imitation be the sincerest form of flattery, we of *THE ARGOSY* crew should be suffused in blushes, as other publications, one after another, fell into line with similar departments.

Patience, then, if you do not see your letter in the Log within six weeks. The huge circulation of *THE ARGOSY* compels us to go to press far in advance of date, for one thing, and for another, I endeavor, in so far as possible, to have the communications take their turn. Of course, in making selections for print, I give the preference to those writers who really say something I think other readers would be interested in reading. Of late, too, you may have noticed I have gained some space by refraining from comments of my own, except when these were especially called for.



At last we have found him—the bucko mate—not merely a fire-eating swash-buckler and a manhandler, but something more. Not since Stevenson and Jack London has there been written a story which for sheer masterly characterization and gripping adventure can equal.

"GREEN SPIDERS"

BY ALFRED D. PETTIBONE

Author of "The Yellow Furlough," etc.

a six-part serial, beginning in *THE ARGOSY* for March 22.

This is the stuff of genius—a story of the sea, with a fresh tang of the salt leagues in its pages—a yarn of many strands, indeed, wrought with the consummate art of a miracle master of prose. This may be praise indeed, but when a story can make a jaded editorial reader sit up and take notice—well, it must be *some* story. Desperate hazards in tropic seas; treachery without and within; suspicion, and with it all a masterly presentation of character stripped to the raw, elemental, savage, ruthless,

bestial - and noble. To take but one instance from the author's gallery of portraits, *Mankus* will live as long as stories are published and there are people to read them.



The backwaters of a great city, brooding in a decay which takes no account of the roaring tide all about them, furnish a fascinating field for the imagination.

"THE HOUSE IN SILVER STREET"

BY FRANCIS JAMES

our complete novelette for March 22, has taken a mystery of these mews and alleys and made it live again in a fascinating and absorbing story. Strange things happened in the house in Silver Street, or was it a trap into which *Tommy Graydon* had been led by a girl to whom he had never been introduced? What he found there, what he heard and then did not hear—that is for you to discover. And there is a musty odor, too, about certain cellars; but it was more than mere mustiness that rose like an impalpable yet pungent effluvia out of the dark depths of this place of rustlings—the cellar of lost youth and of living death.



Among next week's short stories you will find your favorite, Chief Henry Red Eagle, with "KNUCKLED" that will surely cause you to sit up and take notice; while Henry Leverage throws a powerful side-light on crook life in "BEYOND THE LAW." There will be many other A-oners, too, but I have space here to mention only "THE QUALITY OF MERCY," a tale of deep feeling and human interest by Mary E. Worts.



NOTHING CAN BEAT THE ARGOSY

Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Please give us more stories like "The Sultana of Marib," "Romance in the Raw," and "Broad-name Whispers," as I think they are just grand. Nothing can beat THE ARGOSY when it comes to stories—both short and serial. As I read each copy I mail them to the soldiers so that they can enjoy them, too. I enjoy the Log-Book very much. All success to THE ARGOSY.

IRENE D. ZENOB.

AT THE HEAD OF ALL MAGAZINES

Northboro, Massachusetts.

We have been reading THE ARGOSY for over eight years, and wish to thank you for many pleasant hours. We unhesitatingly place it at the head of all magazines. The only poor stories we remember were "Castaways of the Year 2000" and "Fruit of the Lamp." There are several that we consider unexcelled. Among these were "The Trap-Line Runners," "The Man with the 44 Chest," "Taming Fierce Elton," "The Seal of John Solomon," "In the Blue Limousine," "Why There Was a Murder on Pearl Street," "Wooden Spoil," "The Brides of Sana," and "The Sultana of Marib." All the short stories were good.

Give us some more of Chief Henry Red Eagle; there is action in his tales. My particular fondness is for tales of the Canadian Northwest. Have

not mentioned any of Fred Jackson's stories, but they follow closely those I have mentioned in excellence. We like serials and short stories; have no preference. Your magazine is all right the way it is, so "for the love of Pete" don't change it.

B. E. THAYER.

MODESTY REWARDED

Geyserville, California.

Enclosed find ten cents, for which please send me, at once, THE ARGOSY for December 21, 1918, as the place I always buy THE ARGOSY forgot to save the 21st issue for me. I sure like the serials, and do not want to miss any of the chapters, as it spoils the story. I have been a reader of THE ARGOSY for years, and think there is no other book like it.

Well, this is the first that I have ever written to THE ARGOSY. I know it is not worth putting in the Log-Book, but as long as it is read, that is all I wish. Hoping THE ARGOSY will have a long life,

H. D. SIERCK.

ARGOSY ADDRESS AT FOOT OF CONTENTS PAGE

111 Gothering Street,

Halifax, Nova Scotia.

Dad and I were a tiny bit disappointed at not seeing our letter printed in the Log-Book, but perhaps you overlooked it; we think so, anyway. Dad never misses a copy, and has been reading

them ever since I was a "wee kiddie," and since I've "grewed up" I enjoy them as much as he. *THE ARGOSY* is the only magazine I've ever read, with the exception of a motion-picture publication, and they are the best going. Halifax is pretty quiet in winter, and the good old *ARGOSY* and a grate fire passes off cheerfully what would otherwise be a pretty dull evening. With the best of good luck, dad and I beg to remain,

Two constant readers,
G. G. KENDRICK AND MABEL.

P. S.—Would it not be to an advantage to put *THE ARGOSY*'s address in the aforesaid magazine? I can never find it, and the address to which I am enclosing this I do not think correct; but I am going to take what Columbus did, and that's a—risk.

PREFERS WESTERN AND WAR TALES

Willow City, North Dakota.

I am afraid I am rather late with my request, but hope you have one magazine left for me. So enclosed you will find thirteen cents, for which please send me your *ARGOSY* for August 31. Somehow I missed getting to the news-stand in time for that number; and they don't last very many days before all are gone. I enjoyed the story, "Sunnie of Timberline," very much, and hope I may still get the ending.

I have read your magazine off and on for about two years now. During the winter I haven't much time for reading, and yet something seems missing if I don't read *THE ARGOSY*. I always read it from cover to cover, and like the continued stories as well as the short ones and novels. But must say my favorites are the Western and war stories. War stories are always interesting, I think. The West, especially here in North Dakota, isn't made up of long, beautiful days, though, as just at present we are having a blizzard; but that only makes *THE ARGOSY* more welcome. So here's hoping it may have a long future as a weekly. If you print this in the Log-Book, please use only my initials.

N. C. O.

SELTZER'S "HE-MAN" STORIES

Foxboro, Massachusetts.

Enclosed find money order for four dollars for subscription to *THE ARGOSY* for one year. I have been a subscriber for two years now, and a reader from the news-stand a year before that. Would also say that it takes a mighty interesting story to keep me satisfied. I find them in *THE ARGOSY*. Before I became a regular reader of *THE ARGOSY*, Zane Grey was my favorite author; but C. A. Seltzer is giving him an awful run for the money in his *he-man* stories of the West. In the stories of "Riddle Gawne," "Slow Burgess," and "Trouble—Plenty" Seltzer showed the spirit of the West in fair play toward man or woman.

It is a habit with me to judge the writers to the Log-Book by the stories they like best, and the authors. Everybody seems to be satisfied, only differently from others. Any one that isn't, in my opinion, isn't worth the grouch they must always be carrying around.

Here are a few of my favorites in authors so—if this escapes the waste-basket—some of the

readers of the Log-Book can judge me. First comes Seltzer, then comes Zane Grey, when he writes; Frank Blighton, Edgar Franklin, a genius in his kind of stories; Loring Brent, Victor Rousseau, and Rex Parson. Max Brand, for the *All-Story Weekly*, and Isabel Ostrander are fine. I could write a lot more about the many hours of pleasure I take in reading *THE ARGOSY* and *All-Story Weekly*. As always, a booster for both,

E. H. BROWN.

CLEAN-CUT AND WHOLESOME STORIES

Clark's Harbor,

Nova Scotia, Canada.

The half has never yet been told. So much has been said and so much praise from various readers of *THE ARGOSY* that I hardly know just where to begin. But with all that has been said about *THE ARGOSY*, I am safe in saying that the half has never been told, and the best is yet to come.

I have been a reader of your magazine for a good many years, and a subscriber for several, and I think it is the last word in literature, so far as a magazine is concerned. I have read a great many others, and I must say I like this one best for its clean-cut, wholesome, all-round stories. If you were to ask me what particular line of fiction I prefer best, I would be at a loss just how to reply. But taking *THE ARGOSY* as a whole, there is absolutely no room for faultfinding.

For my preference, I prefer Western stories, something like the ranch, lumber, and mining-camp variety; something with snap and go in it. With regard to authors, I suppose I have my favorites, but with all due respect to *THE ARGOSY* and its writers, I must say I like them all. In closing, might say, if you will pardon me for taking so much space, that I look forward each week to the coming of *THE ARGOSY* and welcome it with pleasure, and can hardly wait until Sunday comes to turn its pages for the good things it contains. I have never written to *THE ARGOSY* before, and trust you will find space in your Log-Book for this. Wishing *THE ARGOSY* all the success that it richly deserves, I am,

J. H. DE MONT.

P. S.—I think "Square Deal Sanderson" and "The Listener" were, without exception, the two best stories I have read in any magazine.

A READER FOR TWENTY YEARS

59 Gouvenir Avenue,
Montreal, Canada.

Enclosed please find ten cents covering issue of December 7 and the sixty-second number of your weekly *ARGOSY*. How I ever missed getting this is beyond me, as I have been a constant reader for about twenty years, and have never missed a number. As I am not always able to read *THE ARGOSY* immediately after getting it, I always have about ten ahead, and then when I get a chance take a serial or complete story and read it through; sometimes a few short ones.

There is something I would like to suggest, and I think would suit others that read as I do—that is, when I get a book I immediately number it on the front and on the binding so that it can be plainly seen when in a bookcase. This I find

very convenient when I start a serial, as it is much quicker to pick out the next book. You will note that December 7 is the sixty-second issue of your weekly numbers. At the beginning of the year I would start with No. 1 again.

THE ARGOSY is the only book that I read, and it suits me to a "T." As to my favorite authors—well, they are all good. Trusting that this numbering-scheme will meet with your approval.

LESLIE E. FOGARTY.

With regard to numbering THE ARGOSY consecutively, it is barely possible that at some time we may affix the whole number, dating from the beginning, December 9, 1882, on each week's copy. The thousandth issue will be reached in about a year.

HIS ONE KICK

126 Warren Street,
Brighton, Massachusetts.

A few words of commendation, and also a complaint, for your very interesting magazine and its equally interesting companion weekly, the *All-Story Weekly*. My attention was first attracted to THE ARGOSY by the book-length novel, "One-Cylinder Sam." I have since read the same, and innumerable other stories which have appeared in either one of your magazines, in book form. After that I lost track of this magazine until very recently; last May, in fact. However, I have now resolved that I shall never, by fault of mine, miss even one edition of either magazine.

Of course there have been stories in both that I did not like, but that is natural and human. The majority of them I have found to be highly diverting. Now the kick. There is one type of story which has never interested me (outside of Dumas's works), and that is the historical story. The average author does not know his subject when he tries to write such a story as "The Bronze Helmet" or "Black Wolf of Picardy," and consequently to one who has made a study of history, what would otherwise be an interesting story, becomes offensive through the manner in which the author has twisted historical fact to fit his fiction. Enough of that, however. Long and prosperous life to THE ARGOSY and the *All-Story Weekly*.

N. CARL LO CASCIO.

A CATTLE-RANCH DWELLER BOOSTS THE WEST

Albee, Oregon.

Well, I just finished reading "Square Deal Sanderson," and it sure was a square deal; but between it and "Riddle Gawne" it would be impossible to say which is the best. But I must say our hats are off to Charles Alden Seltzer; he is some author. We didn't get to finish "Slow Burgess"; missed the last two numbers, so I am enclosing twenty cents for those two issues; the last one we got was April 20, 1913, so please send the next two.

I live on a cattle-ranch in the heart of the Rockies, in what they call Camas Prairie, and THE ARGOSY is our chief source of enjoyment, for I read it aloud from cover to cover, so we all enjoy it; and I must say it is the *finest, cleanest* magazine it has ever been my good fortune to run

across. Several years ago I took a number of magazines, but since THE ARGOSY has become a weekly, I have discarded all but it.

With D. Blue, of the December 21 Log, I must say there is something radically wrong with any one who says the West is narrow. I have lived in different parts of the West my entire life, and am certainly proud of it. Evidently George Adams King has never been in the West, or else a country, new and clean and fine in every way, doesn't appeal to him; but he hasn't any right to call us narrow.

We enjoyed "Peter the Brazen," very much, and are very sorry that his experiences came to an end so soon. Hope the author can find some one to take his place; he should find some rare experiences in South America. We like the serials best, and I save them until they are finished.

Well, I will close, and will be impatiently awaiting my finish of "Slow Burgess." Hope we soon have another of Seltzer's wonderful stories.

MRS. CHRIS STURNS.

DISSECTING THE LOG

36a South Willow Street,
Montclair, New Jersey.

I enjoy very much the letters in the Log-Book. To me most of them are extremely humorous, and I can imagine the editor often reading them with a broad grin on his face—if not familiarity with these letters has bred contempt, or the sorely afflicted editor has lost his sense of humor.

The serious way in which the writers take their epistles is to me quite delicious. They praise or lambast the editor and authors, and actually seem to think the work of certain authors will be immediately eliminated because they do not approve of it; and one correspondent is almost fearful that serials may, in the future, be discontinued because he does not read them. He says: "But don't discontinue your serials on my account." How delicious that is!

Then again, the commands the very patient editor receives to omit certain types of stories or novels is very amusing. Very few of these letter writers seem to realize that the editor has to cater to many people of many minds, and that a story or novel that does not suit one class of readers appeals strongly to another.

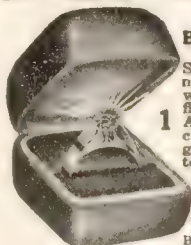
I wonder if many readers of your excellent magazine only enjoy reading the letters in the Log-Book from the same standpoint that I do—namely, the unconscious humor I find in many of them? Nevertheless I think it is a very clever idea to have a department in your magazine wherein the readers can state their opinions of the stories and novels and also of the authors of the same. Said authors, no doubt, enjoy criticism, pro and con, of their estimable stories that appear in these letters.

There is just one feature, in my humble opinion, that could, with advantage, be somewhat amplified in your magazine, and that is the poems. No doubt the editor realizes as I do that perhaps a majority of the readers of THE ARGOSY do not peruse the poems; then again, there are a good many who appreciate them, and would regret very much if they were omitted. I buy *Munsey's Magazine*, not only because of its excellent articles and stories, but for the meritorious, serious and humorous, poems that appear in the same.

W. J. FENN.

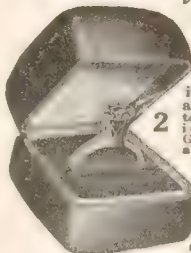


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WRITE TODAY

**M. HAYWOOD, President
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DEAR SIR: Please send me by return mail your free book on the new Haywood Tire Surgery Method and the details of this free school of tire repairing.

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It is being done—by the wonderful new Haywood Method of Tire Surgery. It is one of the great results of the war. A Haywood Tire Surgeon can do more with old tires than was even dreamed of before the war. By the Haywood Method a Haywood Tire Surgeon can give 4,000 to 5,000 more miles of new life to a tire, that two years ago would have been thrown on the junk pile. As a surgeon saves human lives by his operations, so by Haywood Tire Surgery, you can save and lengthen the life of old tires. And it's easy to learn.

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20,000,000 tires wearing down every day. By Tire Surgery, you can quickly repair, rebuild and give new life to tires seemingly all worn out. Cuts, gashes, tears, bruises, broken fabric, every kind of an accident that can happen to any tire, inside or out, you can repair and save for long service. The chance to make money is simply wonderful.

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During the war the nation needed an unusual service to keep the thousands of automobiles, ambulances and airplanes going day and night. HAYWOOD TIRE SURGERY met the demand.

If we told you all the truth you wouldn't believe it. You would say, "It is too good to be true". But you can see what a great field there is for Haywood Tire Surgery Stations—for this better way. You have eyes. You sensibly there must be wonderful chances to make money. But to see it, sometimes not enough. It is action—decision that counts these days. The man who waits, will sit in the shuffle. It is the resolute will to follow your hunch that lands you where the money is.

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Haywood Tire & Equipment Co.
655 Capitol Avenue ~ Indianapolis, Indiana**



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"He Deposits \$500 a Month!"

"See that man at the Receiving Teller's Window? That's Billy King, Sales Manager for the Browning Company. First of every month he comes in and deposits \$500. I've been watching Billy for a long time—take almost as much interest in him as I do in my own boy.

"Three years ago he started in at Browning's as a clerk at \$15 a week. Married, had one child, couldn't save a cent. One day he came in here desperate—wanted to borrow a hundred dollars—wife was sick.

"I said, 'Billy, I'm going to give you something worth more than a loan—some good advice—and if you'll follow it I'll let you have the hundred, too. You don't want to be a \$15 clerk all your life, do you?' Of course he didn't. 'Well,' I said, 'there's a way to climb out of your job to something better. Take up a course with the International Correspondence Schools in the work you like best and want to advance in, and put in some of your evenings getting special training. The Schools will do wonders for you—I know, we've got several I. C. S. boys right here in the bank.'

"That night Billy wrote to Scranton and a few days later he had started a course in Salesmanship. It had a fascination for him and in a little while he got his chance on the city sales force. Why, in three months he had doubled his salary! Next thing I knew he was put in charge of a branch office up state.

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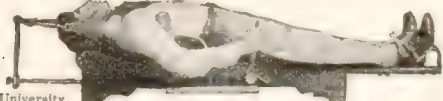


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When Johnny has the Croup!

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Why *shouldn't* grandmother swear by Musterole for colds and coughs? It is better than a mustard plaster—good as *that* was in the old days. And the explanation is this:

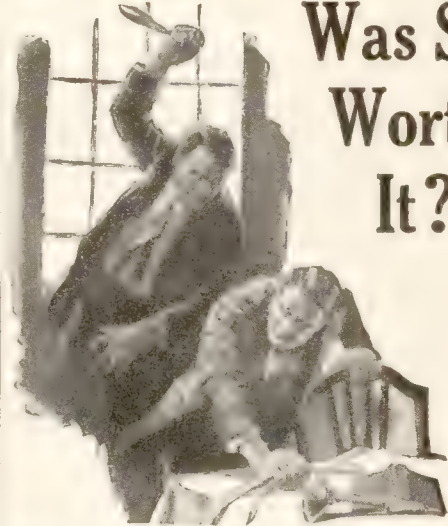
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Overcomes **WEAKNESS** and **ORGANIC AILMENTS** of **WOMEN** and **MEN**. Develops erect, graceful figure. Brings restful relief, comfort, ability to do things, health and strength.

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Does away with the strain and pain of standing and walking; replaces and supports misplaced internal organs; reduces enlarged abdomen; straightens and strengthens the back; corrects stooping shoulders; develops lungs, chest and bust; relieves backache, curvatures, nervousness, ruptures, constipation. Comfortable and easy to wear. **KEEP YOURSELF FIT.** Write today for illustrated booklet, measurement blank, etc., and read our very liberal proposition.

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For Boys and Girls Also



"You Lie!"

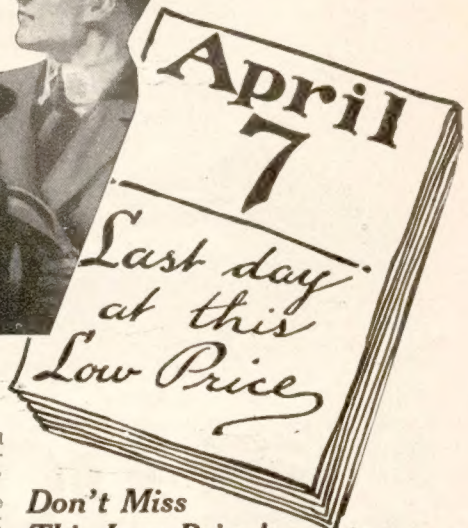
HERE in this one-horse town—at night—they stood before the judge—arrested—she an heiress, promised to a big politician—he, the man beside her, not her fiancé—

Why did they lie? Why did they hide their true names? Find out the amazing sentence the judge pronounced upon them. The startling outcome of it all makes a big story. Read it. It's told by

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First Uniform Edition

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If you are one of those who know that somewhere in the world, splendid adventures are always happening; that a beautiful woman can be interesting; that today—at this moment—brave men are laughing at fear—tricking death—defying fate and winning the women they love—Richard Harding Davis is for you.



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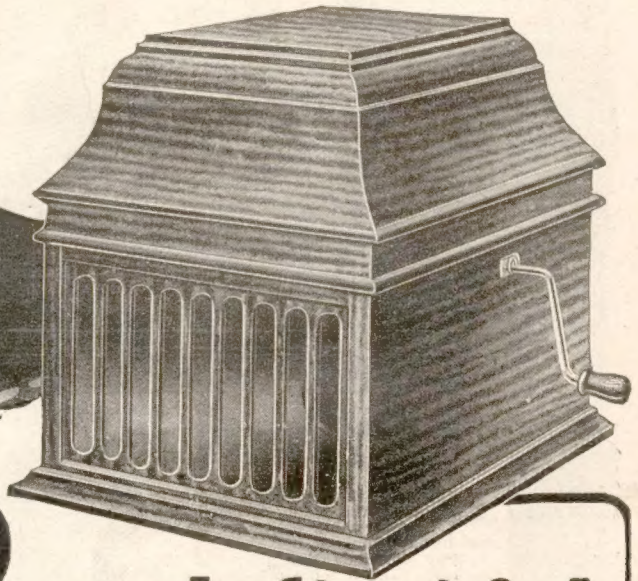
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...and with the 200 men
who sailed for the
Peace Conference

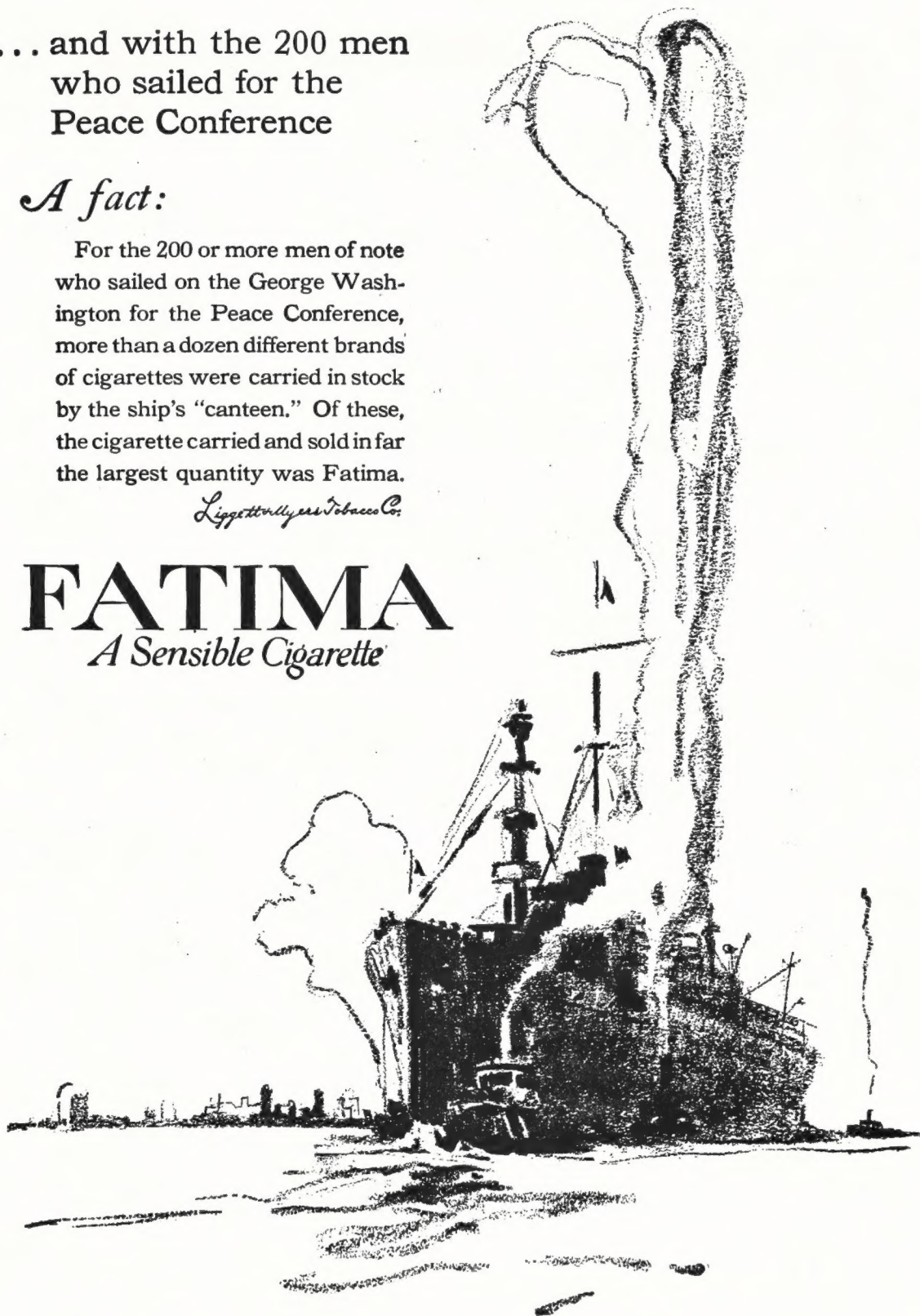
A fact:

For the 200 or more men of note
who sailed on the George Wash-
ington for the Peace Conference,
more than a dozen different brands
of cigarettes were carried in stock
by the ship's "canteen." Of these,
the cigarette carried and sold in far
the largest quantity was Fatima.

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Size Bust.....Belt.....Hip.....Length.....

If I am not satisfied with the Ladies' Frock, I can return it and get my payment back. Otherwise, I will pay the advertised price \$18.95 on your terms of \$1.00 with coupon, balance \$3.00 monthly.

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